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XI.

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THE CATASTROPHE.



Part IV.

MAILLEFERT.

I.

It was late when Raymond woke up. As it was Sunday, he told Master Béru not to rouse him, even for breakfast. The weather was superb. It was one of those splendid autumn mornings, frequent in the valley of the Loire—when a light mist hovers over the hills, and above the fading trees, which stretch as far as the eye can reach. Raymond opened his window, and the fresh air swept into his room. The high street of Rosiers was gay and noisy. High mass was just over, and groups of peasant girls stood outside the church chattering and laughing—their rosy faces shining with health under their white caps.

However, instead of busying himself with his toilette, Raymond installed himself in the cosy arm-chair which the innkeeper had brought from Saumur for his especial comfort, and remained buried in thought. The baron's last words still rang in his ears. "She should be my wife!" "Yes," he said, half aloud—"yes, she must be my wife!" He realised that it was of course to fight any longer with himself—he knew that he loved Simone de Maillefert. He loved her with that all-absorbing love which sometimes takes possession of a man's faculties, which fills all his thoughts, and in fact his whole life, and, according to its success or defeat, makes him either the happiest or most wretched of mortals. But she—would she love him in return? He asked himself this question and thought of her blushes, the emotion he had read on her expressive face, and said to himself—"I am not indifferent to her!" and he experienced a thrill of hope.

Still he recalled what the baron had said, that the girl knew of his having undertaken her defence, and of his having fought with Bizet on her account. "Poor fool that I am," he said, "to take what is only commonplace gratitude for a token of serious interest." But as he was ready to scale mountains and disregard all obstacles for her sake, he determined to calmly weigh all his chances of success. Alas! they seemed to fade as he examined them, for even supposing that Simone loved him, what then?

He now knew enough respecting the family matters of the Mailleferts to feel convinced that the duchess and her son would, with all their strength and energy, oppose Simone's marriage to any one. Would not the poor child's

marriage deprive them of the enjoyment of her income, which was now their only resource? And, besides, he realized that this girl had consecrated her life to an overwhelming task. And he believed her heroic enough to eat her heart out rather than renounce watching over the honour of the family, and preserving her great name from the opprobrium to which it was constantly exposed by the mad prodigality of her mother and brother. Who was he, Raymond Dolorge, to dare to aspire to the hand of a girl of her beauty, rank, and wealth? A poor engineer, with only his salary and a modest inheritance to depend upon. And this was not all! What would his mother say when she heard of his love, his hopes, and projects? He could divine Madame Delorge's astonishment, he could even hear the words she would use. "Shame on you!" she would say, "have you forgotten your murdered father? Shame on you that you can think of personal happiness while Maumussy and Combelaïne still remain unpunished." And, as if to increase Raymond's sadness, his conscience pointed out to him the most extraordinary examples of tenacious fidelity. His mother, to begin with; then Madame Cornevin, who had brought up her five children and educated them so far above their station; then Léon Cornevin, who had retained all his indomitable will, even though his career had been blighted; and Jean, also, who had deserted country, friends, and family to search for his father, and recover the letter which General Delorge had written and confided to the care of the loyal and unfortunate groom. Was not Roberjot's conduct, and even that of timid M. Ducoudray, a cruel reproach to Raymond? "Yes, it is true," he said—"it is true that I am unworthy, and yet I love her. I am no longer master of myself, for I love her!"

The very excess of his enthusiasm recalled him to the consciousness that if he lingered much longer in his room the baron would come in person to summon him. Accordingly he hurried down stairs and found his friend holding court, as the baron himself termed it. Every Sunday after church he summoned Master Béru and cross-examined him with wonderful keenness and patience as to the peasants of the neighbourhood, declaring that he derived from his answers an immense amount of information which aided him in his work. He had just heard a peasant in the vicinity that had had his best meadows rendered utterly sterile for years by the inundation of 1836, when he caught sight of Raymond in the passage. He immediately abandoned Béru and several peasants who had joined the conference, and hurried after the young man. "What a lazy fellow you are!" he cried. "Do you know that I breakfasted an hour ago?" Near-sighted as he was, he could not help starting as he caught sight of Raymond's face. "Are you ill?" he asked.

"Not at all; I am only tired."

"Tired? With one ball—an innocent quadrille and a few glasses of mild punch!" And as Raymond did not reply, the baron looked at him for a moment. "Ah! I have it," he cried; "Mademoiselle de Maillefert——"

The entrance of Madame Béru with some fresh-laid eggs for Raymond's meal checked the good man. But when she had retired—"By my faith!" he continued, "I fail to see why the recollection of the most charming young girl in the world should give a lover such a funereal aspect."

"Alas!" sighed Raymond.

"You have discovered obstacles?"

"Insurmountable ones."

The old engineer shrugged his shoulders. "Upon my word," he muttered, "the young men of our day are easily discouraged. They are heroes

when the paths are smooth and flowery, but they are baffled and turn back at the first mole hill they encounter."

"Sir——"

"Just be quiet! You will only say that you like facile enterprises, but allow me to remark that one only achieves fame by scaling apparently inaccessible mountains. A man may be proud of having climbed Mont Blanc, but he does not say much of the Heights of Montmartre. When I was your age the impossible had charms for me; and even old as I am to-day, I believe in miracles. The sorceress who accomplishes them is at the bidding of us all. She is called 'Will.'"

He expressed his convictions in the tone of a man whose theories are not merely experimental ones. But Raymond's face did not brighten. "If you knew, sir," he began, "all that I have to struggle against,"

He was in one of those moods when the most treasured secrets rise to the lips, and if the old engineer had realized this he would soon have learned the mystery which had so troubled him. But just then he was occupied with the practical side of the affair. "The truth is, my boy," he began, "while you were dancing with the daughter, I yielded to the temptation of teasing the mother. It was a stupid thing to do, and she wished me six feet under ground. The end being that we shall never be asked again to the château, and you are cut adrift from the young lady!" He smoked his pipe for a few moments in silence, and then he added; "I suppose we ought to make our peace, but how? That is indeed the puzzle. I must go back now to my good people, who are growing impatient, but later on we will have another little talk."

When Raymond had finished breakfasting he lighted a cigar and went out. It was, he said to himself, merely to enjoy the air and the sunshine, and to be alone. Only chance led him to the other side of the Loire, and induced him to take a little path which wound up a hill, whence he could look down on the Maillefert gardens and a portion of the park. From the spot where he had stationed himself he could see the various guests who had come with the duchess from Paris, walking up and down the balconies and leaning over the railings. There were a dozen of them or more, men and women, and from their lively gestures, it was easy to see that they did not find the time hang heavy on their hands. For the first time Raymond felt a pang of envy. He envied the young men whom he saw laughing and talking. They, at least, were on good terms with the duchess, and her door was readily opened to them. He himself had a right to call at the château to be sure, or rather it was his duty to call there now, but he was quite sure that when he presented himself some insolent lackey would tell him that the ladies do not receive. He would have nothing else to do but to hand the man his card, and that would be the end of it. However he was somewhat consoled by not seeing Simone. Where was she? He was indulging in vague surmises when strangely enough he obtained an indirect answer from two peasants who were talking together by the side of the road. They seemed somewhat jolly, and wore their Sunday garments.

"Hallo, Bruneau!" said one of them. "Where are you going?"

"To the château."

"What! On Sunday? You won't see the young lady to-day."

"Yes, I shall, for it's on Sunday that she sees her farmers, so as not to disturb them on other days."

"And what are you going to the château for?"

"To take some money there."

"Why, I thought you only paid your rent at Christmas time."

"And so I do, but the young lady asked me and two or three others to pay her half in advance this year."

"And you are going to do so?"

"I am going to do better. I am taking her the whole."

"I suppose if she asked you for two years in advance, you would take her five?"

"I should try to oblige her, I'm sure."

"And your wife—what does she say?"

"She says that if I had to borrow money, I must do it, as Mademoiselle Simone wants it. Madame Bruneau remembers one night when she was so ill that she could not move hand or foot, and the baby had the croup. The young lady came on horseback through a driving rain, and then went to Saumur for the medicine the doctor ordered."

The other had nothing to say to this, and so the men separated.

"What can have happened," thought Raymond, "that Mademoiselle de Maillefert is reduced to ask for advances from her tenants? What new folly of her mother's is she compelled to repair, or what new iniquity of her brother's is she forced to hide?" And his heart ached as he thought of the poor young creature, harassed and preyed upon by these cormorants. She must have an iron will to resist their entreaties so long. But the day would surely come, when wearied in soul and body by this atrocious combat, she would say: "Take it all; spend it, throw it away—and with it the honour of our house!" It was with unspeakable joy that Raymond thought of the possible ruin of Simone de Maillefert. When that day came, he would be near her, and then he might confess his love without being suspected of a shameful speculation.

Such were his thoughts as he walked back towards the inn. He had just reached the suspension bridge when he heard himself called, and on turning he perceived the redoubtable Bizet, with his arm in a sling. "Good morning!" exclaimed the young provincial. "I hear you were at the ball last night. I congratulate you. You have conquered, it seems. The statue is animated! Her beautiful eyes look tenderly upon you! She danced, and smiled! It was quite a wonder. Oh, I have heard all about it!"

Raymond calculated the height of the bridge and the depth of the water—and had great difficulty in restraining himself from pitching Bizet over the parapet.

"Come now," continued his companion, "what is the use of being so reserved with a friend—for we are friends. Two men who have tried to kill each other are always friends for life. When is the marriage coming off?"

"Good morning!" said Raymond, and he marched away, leaving Bizet looking after him with an expression of wonder and indignation on his face.

Raymond was intensely annoyed; from what this young fellow had said he could judge what inferences had been drawn by the persons who saw Simone reject partner after partner and then accept himself. He realized that if all this gossip reached the duchess it would only give her another reason for closing her doors on him. This, too, was the opinion of the baron to whom he confided his fears. "I wish to heaven," cried Raymond, "that I had Bizet in the field again. I would certainly nail him to a tree."

The baron frowned. "And you would make a great mistake! Your dear Bizet is only a fool, and as fools are in the majority in this world, it is of little use to try and exterminate them. Let us rather endeavour to find some way to make our peace at the château."

But they found none, although they spent the whole evening thinking it over. And night, that counsellor divine, sent them no inspiration. Raymond was, therefore, rather dismal on the next day when he returned with the baron to the scene of their operations.

They were then finishing some soundings near Les Tuffeaux at a point where the Loire winds so closely to the slopes that they are merely separated by a narrow field and a road cut up by the constant passage of heavily laden carts.

The morning passed quickly, and about three o'clock, while they partook of luncheon and rested near the road, one of their assistants exclaimed: "Hullo! Here comes Madame de Maillefert and her party!"

The baron and Raymond started to their feet; and only a few yards away, at a point where the road skirted some huge moss-grown rocks, they espied seven or eight persons, of either sex, on horseback, who were slowly riding towards them. In front came the duchess, attired in a close-fitting riding-habit and her yellow hair arranged with studied carelessness under her tall hat. On reaching the baron and his companion she reined in her horse, and in her most gracious manner bid them good morning. "I surprise you at work, baron," she said, addressing M. de Boursonne.

The latter was never over-pleased when his title struck his ear; but on this occasion sacrificing himself on the shrine of his young friends's hopes, he assumed his very best smile and gaily replied: "Yes, madame—but we have nearly finished for to-day."

"And our lovely valley will owe you an eternal debt of gratitude if you succeed in rescuing it from the Loire."

"We are doing our best, madame—my young comrade Delorge and I."

This reply was intended to give Raymond an opportunity of mingling in the conversation. But the young fellow did not avail himself of it. He noticed but one thing, that Mademoiselle Simone was not of the party.

The young duke was there in a light gray coat, a huge stiff shirt collar, and one of those small felt hats with a blue ribbon and a green-gauze veil, turned round the brim, which the emperor had just brought into vogue. He now spoke, and asked Raymond, "Are you doing all this work to prevent inundations?"

"Ours is a preparatory work."

"Curious! very curious!" answered the young nobleman, and making his horse leap the ditch as he spoke, he found himself in the meadow by Raymond's side.

The duke was less preposterous on horseback than on foot. His chest seemed less hollow and his shoulders less rounded; and as Béru had said, he was thoroughly at home when mounted, and when he was thrown, it was in a sportsmanlike way, of which he rather boasted. He rode about examining all the instruments, and seemed as astonished by all he saw as if he had been a thorough savage. "Curious! very curious," he repeated,

In the meantime Madame de Maillefert was talking to the baron. "This work must be prodigiously expensive," she said.

"Yes, madame; it will cost several millions."

She turned towards a beautiful brunette, who was with her, and said in a sentimental tone: "How is it possible for a country not to cherish a government which spends so much money in view of insuring its prosperity?"

But she had no time to say more, for her son at this moment returned to her side. "On my honour, mother, you should come here on foot some day

to see these gentlemen use their instruments. It is very odd—very curious indeed—upon my honour it is!”

“We will certainly come again,” replied the duchess; “but in the meantime I hope we shall see these gentlemen at the château.” It was to the baron she spoke, but it was at Raymond she smiled.

“We always have a game of cards in the evening,” remarked the duke encouragingly.

His mother now gathered up her reins. “We shall expect you this evening, gentlemen,” she said; and without waiting for a reply, she touched her horse with her whip, and was off.

“No dress coats!” called the duke over his shoulder; “remember that!”

They were far away before Raymond and the baron had recovered from their surprise, and were able to ask each other what this last piece of politeness indicated. Was it possible to attribute it to chance—to one of those fancies that pass through such a brain as that of the Duchess de Maillefert ten times a day? No; it couldn’t be that. Each detail of the scene indicated deliberate premeditation, and the words and conduct of mother and son alike betrayed a concerted plan. It was clear that they wished to arrive at intimacy with the two engineers. But why, with what object? “They are bored with each other probably,” said Raymond.

“Do you mean,” asked the baron, with a satirical laugh, “that our noble hosts rely on us to amuse their guests by the charms of our conversation?” So saying he caught Raymond’s arm, and whirled him round. “Look me in the white of the eye. Now then, do you know what notion I have taken into my head? It is that the duchess wants you to marry her daughter.”

Raymond’s face flushed. “Your jesting is cruel,” said he.

“I am not jesting.”

“Then you forgot that the duchess and her son are living on Mademoiselle Simone’s income, and naturally don’t wish her to marry.”

“I know it would be their ruin, at least in appearance; but appearances are deceitful. We will soon find out. We shall accept their invitation, shall we not?”

Raymond hesitated. “I hardly know,” he replied.

The baron laughed aloud, and clapping his young friend on the shoulder, he exclaimed: “Hypocrite! hypocrite!”

It was quite true, however, that Raymond was hesitating. Like one of those excitable sportsmen who, when the game rises, becomes so dazzled and nervous he can see nothing, Raymond was never quite able to profit of opportunities. However, at the last moment, just after dinner, the baron asked him, “Shall we go?”

Raymond had not decided; but driven into a corner, he almost involuntarily answered, “Yes, we will go.”

The duchess received them in a small room on the first floor. She half rose from her chair as they entered, extended both hands, and exclaimed: “Welcome, gentlemen!” while the duke flew to them and shook hands as if they had been long lost brothers.

“What the deuce does it mean?” thought the baron. But Raymond never gave it a thought. He was looking at Simone, sitting beside the beautiful brunette, whom he had already seen on horseback with the duchess, and his heart sank as he espied the look of utter surprise with which she surveyed him. “She knows nothing of her mother’s invitation,” he thought. “She did not know I was coming this evening.”

Following the baron's example, he bowed to all the ladies in the drawing-room, and then turned towards three young men, who were laughing and talking with Philippe by the chimney-piece, on which stood an open liquor case. One of those pianists who might be taken for barbers, with their well-combed, well-oiled hair, and who go from château to château all summer in search of some *grande dame* inclined to cultivate their talents sat before the instrument and was playing a rhythmical air. But music had no charms for the young Duke de Maillefert, and he profited by the entrance of our friends to say to the pianist: "Lovely! A charming melody! Yes, on my word! But if you have no objection, we will rest there for to-night."

With the sad resignation of unappreciated genius, the performer closed the piano and leaned against the case. "Ladies and gentlemen," continued Philippe, "as we have an addition to our circle to-night, suppose we have a game of cards—a little *bac*."

"Oh! not baccarat!" exclaimed one of the ladies; "that's a man's game, and it is sure to end in a quarrel. Let us play roulette."

"Oh! yes, roulette," said another lady.

"That is to say that you want another opportunity to empty my pockets," cried the duke, with a laugh. "But I have no objection." And thereupon he rang the bell. "Bring the roulette," he said to the footman who appeared in answer to the summons.

Raymond fancied that every eye was turned mockingly upon him, and he dared not look at Simone. However, the servants brought in the roulette, and arranged it on a table. "To our places!" cried the duke: "we are wasting a great deal of precious time."

Everybody gathered round the table with the exception of the baron. "Will you not join us?" asked the duchess, graciously. "Don't you play?"

"Never, madame."

"Curious that! Upon my word, that is very curious. And why, pray?"

"Because I am afraid of losing."

The reply was rather equivocal, and the duchess promptly asked, "Do you think we play for the sake of winning?"

"Certainly I do," replied the old gentleman, with his usual imperturbability.

M. Philippe having declared that he should sustain the bank with his last farthing, installed himself before a pile of money, and imitating the monotonous, drawling tone of the Rhineland croupiers exclaimed: "Make your game, gentlemen and ladies—make your game."

Chance, assisted by the baron, perhaps, or by the duchess, had placed Raymond between Simone and the brunette with beautiful eyes. The baron fancied that he noticed some significant glances and furtive smiles as the young girl came towards the table. "Did you ever play roulette, sir?" asked the brunette, of Raymond, as Philippe pressed the spring.

"Never madame."

"Then let me show you," and she briefly explained the principles of the game. The ball stopped. "You have lost!" cried the duke. "You are a very bad adviser, duchess."

He spoke to the brunette. She is a duchess, too, thought Raymond. But what did he care? He only wanted a chance to say a word to Simone. But what could he say? What commonplace remarks should he utter? He thought, too, that Simone was equally anxious to speak to him, and he paid no attention to the fact that he had already lost once or twice. Everybody

was laughing round the table, and Raymond would have given words to have been able to say anything. "My vicinity does not seem to bring you good luck," murmured the brunette.

Raymond bowed awkwardly, in a rage at his own stupidity.

"Come ladies and gentlemen—make your game!" cried the duke again. This time the brunette lost on the red. "Upon my word, duchess," said one of the young men, "you will be penniless soon. You had better write to Monsieur de Maumussy to send you some money."

"Maumussy!" Had he heard aright? Raymond asked himself, and he felt faint and ill. Could this woman be the Duchess de Maumussy?

"Oh!" said one lady, "the Duke de Maumussy is not like certain husbands of my acquaintance—he does not wait for his wife to ask for money! Not he!"

There was no more room for doubt. Raymond mechanically responded to the call of the noble croupier, and pursued his train of thought.

"Chance favours you now," said the Duchess de Maumussy. "Shall we go into partnership?"

Raymond started back in horror, but with a great effort of self control he managed to murmur in a faint voice: "Oh, certainly, with pleasure."

He was filled with a wild longing to fly. Ah! if he could only get away without a scene. Fortunately, the baron was watching him and perceived that something had gone wrong, so when tea and some light refreshments were brought at ten o'clock, he said: "Come my dear Delorge, we must be off." Madame de Maillefert wished to retain them, but he pleaded urgent work on the morrow, promised to return again very shortly, and went off with Raymond.

When they were outside, the worthy old fellow asked: "My boy, what is the matter? Your arm trembles like a leaf."

"I cannot talk now, sir," was the reply.

They reached the Rising Sun in profound silence. M. Béru was waiting for them, and on seeing Raymond, he said: "The postman has brought you two letters from Paris. There they are."

Raymond took the letters without a word of thanks, and passed up the stairs with an uncertain tread. The innkeeper noticed this, and asked if he were ill. "Oh, no," replied the baron, but as he entered his chamber he muttered: "What the deuce has gone wrong between the boy and his lady-love?" For he thought that no one but Simone could have put Raymond into such a state. "The lady, on the other side, was very pretty," he resumed, "and she looked at him with very loving eyes, but he answered her once in a very odd way."

His pipe was finished, and he knocked out the ashes. "It may have been nothing after all," he reflected: "that young fellow is as nervous as a girl. I dare say he is sound asleep by this time."

II.

BUT Raymond was not asleep. He was sitting in an arm-chair trying to collect his ideas. "How weak I am!" he muttered. "How cowardly!"

Poor boy! He was neither weak nor cowardly. He was the victim of a situation which he had not created, of a Past which he dragged about with him, as a prisoner drags his chain. Madame Delorge had not realized that it is impossible to limit a man to one idea, no matter how vast it may be

She had not understood that, while her own life was virtually ended, her son's was but beginning; that if all were dead in her, everything in him was new-born. She had not said to herself that, in imposing this superhuman task upon him, she ran the risk of making him loathe it, when a great passion overtook him—when his love and what he called his duty might be at variance.

"No," he said to himself, "I do not forget that my father was murdered in the basest manner. I would give my life to bring his murderers to justice. But I love Mademoiselle Simone, and must I give up seeing her, because Madame de Maumussy is at the Château de Maillefert? How is Madame de Maumussy guilty? She may have been married greatly against her will to this miserable adventurer."

As he spoke he turned the letters he had received to and fro in his hands. One of them came from Roberjot, the other from his mother. He hesitated to open them, having a presentiment that he might find they contained something calculated to crush the hopes which were becoming so dear to him. "Nevertheless, I must read them," he murmured, at last, and broke the seal of his mother's letter first.

"Dear Raymond—The hour of our vengeance is close at hand. I feel it myself, and all our friends believe it. What proves to me that the empire is crumbling is that your father's old friends, who seemed to have forgotten our existence, have all come back to see me. All Paris is absorbed in a very scandalous suit which has been brought against Monsieur de Maumussy by his wife's family. It has been said that De Combelaïne—more ruined than ever—was on the point of marrying Madame Cornevin's unworthy sister, Flora Misri, when the marriage was broke off at the last moment for some most disgraceful reasons. Raymond, my beloved son, remember your father. Keep yourself free from all entanglements, and be ready to act at any moment. Your sister, Pauline, and I, kiss you warmly.—ELIZABETH DELORGE."

"Free! ready to act!" murmured Raymond, with a bitter laugh. "I have lived so for twenty years!" And he opened the lawyer's letter. "I have but one moment," wrote that gentleman, to copy a letter which I have just received from Jean. Read and you will see if the brave fellow is losing his time."

Jean wrote as follows:—"Dear Friends:—After a frightful voyage, during which we should have been drowned, but for the aid of an English clipper, we have at last reached Australia. It was Sunday—the day before yesterday—that I first trod the streets of Melbourne. I at once sought out the man with whom my father left Chili—Pécheira, the smuggler's son. I found his house without the least difficulty, for he is now one of the leading merchants in Melbourne. But he himself was at the mines, and the manager I saw could give me no idea of the probable date of his return. Still this same man said he knew that when Pécheira first came to Australia he was accompanied by a Frenchman named Boutin. I am certain that this Boutin was my father, Laurent Cornevin, and I am convinced that Pécheira can tell me what has become of him. This makes me very happy—for I see the beginning of the end. When our ancestors wished to achieve a difficult task, they imposed upon themselves some rude penance which was a perpetual stimulant. I have therefore sworn that I will never touch brush or palette until I take my father in my arms if he be living, or until I have prayed on his tomb if he be dead. So you may hope my friends, that you will see me soon.—JEAN CORNEVIN."

It was with deep discouragement that Raymond dropped this letter. "If I were not mad," he said, "if I had one ray of courage, I should never enter the Château de Maillefert again." He was, alas! one of those unfortunate beings who are nailed by their imaginations on some chimerical Calvary, who look far in advance of events, and suffer more terribly from the catastrophes they picture to themselves than from real misfortunes.

After a night of struggle his resolution was taken. "I will never try to see Mademoiselle Simone again—never—not if the sacrifice kills me!" he swore.

When he went down to breakfast he was sustained by that bitter satisfaction that a man feels in having conquered some terrible temptation, and his face was composed and smiling. He expected a thousand questions, attacks and jests; but, to his infinite surprise, the baron said nothing, for, to tell the truth, the old gentleman was very acute. He saw that the young fellow's sufferings had been real and intense. "It is clear," he said to himself, "that there is more than I suspected—more than a love affair!"

But precisely because this was his conviction, he was the more careful not to refer to the events of the previous evening—that is not refer to them directly. He felt that Raymond was anxious to keep his secret, and each word he spoke was pre-arranged to tempt his young friend to confession. For instance in talking of the approaching completion of this section of their work, he found an opportunity of remarking that they would soon leave Rosiers. But instead of noting sadness on Raymond's face, he only detected a kind of gloomy joy.

"I wish we could go off to-morrow!" was the young man's reply, spoken in a tone of heartfelt sincerity. He meant what he said. He wished that material obstacles of sea and land might separate him from Mademoiselle Simone, and thus effectually prevent his yielding to temptation.

"I do not understand the fellow!" muttered the baron, who was not altogether actuated by curiosity in his wish to penetrate Raymond's secret. He knew the young man to be so inexperienced, so loyal, and so disposed to believe in the loyalty of others, that he felt him to be an easy dupe—one of those simple fellows who fall into all the snares which are spread out for them. "If he would only trust me," thought the worthy old engineer—"if he would allow himself to be guided by my experience, like a blind man by his chain, he would be freed from all his entanglements. Heaven knows where they will lead him! and the boy is too confoundedly proud to tell his old chief."

This idea worried him so much that he hardly ate any breakfast, and swallowed his coffee so hot that he burned his mouth, and ended by getting into a most abominable temper. He lighted his pipe, and took a seat on one of the stone benches in front of the Rising Sun, beside Madame Bérú, who was enjoying the balmy air, with her hands placidly folded over her fat stomach. "I am positively too good and too kind," he said to Raymond. "Our men take advantage of me. There is not one of them here yet."

Raymond ventured to say a word in defence. "But you know that we are never as early as this."

"What if we are not? It is their business to be on the spot waiting for us; and in future they shall be, or I'll know the reason why!"

From time to time the baron was apt to issue these terrible decrees, but the real goodness of his character speedily caused him to annul them. However, he was discontentedly ruminating anent his delinquents, when at the end of the street he saw a groom wearing the Maillefert livery coming

towards the inn at a rapid trot. At this sight his good humour returned to him. "I will bet you any amount," he said, "that yonder magnificent being is coming to us."

Nor was he mistaken. When the servant reached the Rising Sun, he drew up his horse, and addressing Madame Béru, he asked if M. Delorge were there. Raymond stepped forward while the servant dismounted, and drew an envelope from his belt. "I was told to give this to you, sir."

"Is there an answer required?"

"I think not, sir," and the man swung himself into his saddle again and rode off.

Raymond looked at the letter with a strange reluctance to open it. At last he made a mighty effort, and as he tore it open, a quantity of bank-notes fluttered out.

"What the deuce is that!" exclaimed the old engineer.

The letter was written in a very delicate hand, on thick paper. Raymond read it at a glance: "Sir—You left so hastily that we did not settle our accounts. We were partners, if you remember. After your departure I continued playing—thinking that you would not care much if I lost our common stock. Instead of losing, however, I was favoured by the most insolent good luck, and gained two thousand eight hundred francs, of which I send you your half. You see, our partnership brought us good luck

"DUCHESS DE MAUMUSSY."

Raymond turned pale. "Oh! this is too much!" he gasped. And in a transport of rage he crushed the letter and the bank-notes together. "Madame Béru," he said, in a hoarse voice.

"Sir?"

"Your priest is a worthy man, I believe?"

"Oh! the best in the world, sir; charitable to a degree, and stinting himself for the poor."

"Very well, then, take him this for his poor parishioners." And he tossed the letter and the bank-notes into the apron of the worthy woman, who was stunned with astonishment. Never were eyes so comically anxious as those with which she looked from the money to the baron, who, to tell the truth, was quite as astonished as the woman herself.

"Do you think that Monsieur Delorge was in jest?" she asked, as soon as the young man was out of sight.

"No, I don't," answered the baron.

"But it's such a big sum. What will the *cure* think?"

"You had better wait a little. Let me see," and the baron adroitly withdrew the letter, leaving only the bank-notes in the woman's apron.

"I think," he muttered, "that I had better order a straight-jacket for my maniac. What does this money mean?"

The letter he held would explain everything he thought, but, curious as he was, the idea never occurred to him of reading it. He hurried after Raymond, whom he found in the dining-room drinking a glass of water. "You are too generous, my boy!" he cried, as he went in.

"Eh, sir?" said the young man; "why the money scorched my hands, and I have sent it to the only destination it could have."

The old engineer shrugged his shoulders. "Very good," he said. "But did you know that you gave the letter also to Mother Béru."

"And what of that?"

"Simply that every villager would have seen it before twenty-four hours elapsed."

"It is of no consequence, sir—the whole world might read it."

The baron did not wait an instant longer, but with the most eager curiosity and rapt attention he read and re-read the letter. "Well," he said at last with a mocking smile, "I know more than one exquisite who would be taken off his feet by a note like this, and its intoxicating perfume."

"Sir!"

"She is a lovely creature, this young duchess, with her beautiful eyes, which are soft and flashing by turns."

Raymond started up: "Don't ever speak to me of that woman again, sir!" he cried. "She fills me with horror. Yes, with horror," he repeated. "It is the greatest misfortune for me that I ever met her, and I know perfectly well that she will some day be fatal to me."

As was customary with the baron, he did not allow his impressions of this affair to be seen. "We must start," he said hastily; "we have no time to lose."

They left the room together, and on their way out the baron heard Raymond tell Madame Bérú to carry the money at once to the priest. Then they proceeded to their duties. However, important as the day's work was for the old engineer, he performed it with limited attention, for he was forming his plans for the evening.

"Let us go to Maillefert," he said when dinner was over.

"I don't feel quite well to-night," Raymond replied.

"Never mind. Come with me and be cheered up."

"No, it's impossible."

"To-morrow, then——"

"No, not to-morrow, either."

"Do you think that because you won a heavy sum at the house you never ought to go there again? What will they think of you?"

"Just what they please," answered Raymond, coldly. "Their opinions are profoundly indifferent to me."

"And Mademoiselle Simone?"

Raymond turned pale. "Why do you find so much satisfaction in tormenting me?" he asked.

"Good night," rejoined the baron, as he left the room, annoyed by the young man's reproaches. "I shall go to the château to-night for his sake," he muttered, "and we will see if the people there are as discreet as he is."

Five minutes later he was walking up the avenue. As on the evening before, the duchess was seated in the small drawing-room on the first floor, but fewer persons were with her. Several had left that morning, and Philippe had gone to Angers with a friend for forty-eight hours. However, the young Duchess de Maumussy was there, sitting by Simone's side on the sofa, facing the door. She wore a black dress, with poppy-coloured ruffles, and a cluster of red pinks, the last of the season, bedecked her hair. Her theatrical beauty was dazzling on this occasion. Her eyes emitted phosphorescent gleams through their fringed lashes, and her skin was exquisite with its pearly reflections. Simone's pale refined beauty looked wan beside her's, and, moreover, the young girl seemed weary.

"I am truly glad to see you," said Madame de Maillefert when the baron was announced. "But you are alone," she added, with a tinge of disappointment in her voice; "what has become of Monsieur Delorge?"

"He is poorly," said the baron, in a melancholy tone. "Very poorly, indeed."

He had provided himself with his glasses before he said this, and he

watched Simone and the young duchess keenly as he spoke. He saw them start and exchange involuntary glances. "Good!" he said to himself, "that's one point."

Unfortunately he had no time to profit by what he felt to be a discovery, for two noblemen from the neighbourhood, with their wives, now entered the room. They had bitten at the bait offered by the duchess, and, after disapproving of the Imperial government for eighteen years, they decided, in 1869, to change and adhere to it. They made certain conditions, it is true, for one of them asked to be the ministerial candidate at the approaching elections, while the other wished to be made a prefect. "These people," thought the baron, "are rather late in the day in their change of political opinions." Then, seeing that Simone had vacated her seat beside Madame de Maumussy, he quietly made his way towards it.

"I will confess the fair penitent," he said to himself, as he carefully framed his questions. But his diplomacy was needless, and he speedily became convinced, almost immediately acquired the certainty, that she had never seen Raymond before this visit to Maillefert. As if the old gentleman had not been almost a total stranger to her, she began to talk of her native land, Italy, and her family, relating all her past life with surprising frankness. The baron was astonished, although he had formerly lived in Rome and Florence, and retained vivid recollection of the ingenuousness of Italian women, and their horror of affectation and prudery.

The young Duchess de Maumussy knew nothing of the world, and she acknowledged it with great sincerity, mentioning that she had spent twenty years in a convent at Naples, where she had a very dull time of it she said. One fine morning, however, her father told her he had found a husband for her, a great French lord, who, in exchange for her enormous dowry, would assist his wife's family with his political influence. In a fortnight she was Duchess de Maumussy. She had made no objections. In fact she was very grateful to be released from the convent. She had been dazzled by her change of position—by the bustle of the paternal mansion succeeding to the quiet of the cloister—by the lovely toilettes of her marriage trousseau, and the flattering words murmured in her ear. When all this pleasing bewilderment was over it was too late. It was not that she had any reason to complain of her husband. The Duke de Maumussy was perfect—attentive to her slightest wishes, always seeing that her purse was full, specifying for pin-money on her behalf in all his negotiations, and providing her with the finest diamonds and most gorgeous equipages in Paris. Thus was she hated and envied on all sides. She spoke of her husband with affection—only he was not the husband she had dreamed of when she talked with her young friends in Naples. The duke was elegant and witty, tenderly sentimental or ironically so, as the fancy took him. But he was thirty years older than she was; he might have been her father. He was old and she was young. She often doubted if she were married, for sometimes three or four days elapsed without her seeing him. Politics and business absorbed his days and pleasure devoured his nights. So that under the spur of ambition or the lash of necessity he led a most restless existence. He allowed her entire liberty, and made such a parade of doing so that she sometimes felt humiliated by her independence.

It was in the most simple and natural tone that she confided all this to the baron, who said to himself: "She is too artless by far. What is her purpose in telling me these things? For me to repeat them to Raymond? Singular commission!"

He saw that he was not alone in hearing what the young duchess said, for Simone had returned and taken a chair close by. One of the other ladies began to talk to her, but Simone's thoughts were evidently elsewhere. She heard—was indeed listening to what Madame de Maumassy was saying, and she did not lose one word of it. Her cheeks became even paler, and her eyes flashed fire as she listened.

"Both these women love the boy," thought the baron. "They have discovered it, and they hate each other. But why? and why has he fled? Was he afraid to choose?"

At this moment the long-haired pianist, who had been taking an inspiring walk by moonlight, sat down at the piano, and as the duke was not there, he soon filled the room with the sounds of the instrument.

The old engineer profited by this occasion to take his leave, with a feeling of satisfaction, but a little doubtful whether he ought to speak to Raymond of his discoveries or not. On the whole, he decided that it would be wiser to remain silent, at least for the time being. It was clear that the young man was very unhappy; in truth, his determination not to return to Maillefert cost him dear. To feel that he had but to extend his hand and reach the happiness he longed for, was almost unbearable. He could not leave the Rising Sun without seeing the terraces of Maillefert, and the white front of the château through the trees on the other side of the Loire. He had almost decided either to ask for a change or to resign, when on the following Sunday, after mass, while the baron was as usual holding court, he went out and turned his steps towards the slope overlooking the gardens of Maillefert.

At a turn of the road he found himself face to face with Simone. She was not alone, for she had her English governess, Miss Lydia Dodge, a tall angular person, with a red nose and pale face, beside her. Simone must have just left church, for the governess carried two prayer books. Confused to such a degree that his limbs trembled under him, Raymond stood still; and as the young girl, equally disturbed, also stopped, they stood looking at each other in such embarrassment that Miss Lydia could not conceal her astonishment.

It was Simone who spoke first. "You have been ill, I think," she said, in a low voice. "I trust you are better!"

"Thank you."

"And that we shall soon see you at the château."

Miss Lydia now said a few words in English, but the girl did not seem to hear them; for she did not reply to her governess.

But she added to Raymond "I hope you will come."

Miss Lydia coughed, and thought it advisable to interfere. "Is this the gentleman," she asked, "who has just given fourteen hundred francs to the poor of Rosiers?"

Raymond started.

"How did you know that, mademoiselle?" he asked.

"Because the priest has just said so."

"Do you mean that he mentioned my name?"

"No," said Simone; "but he described you so well that the grateful poor recognized you at once." And as Miss Lydia drew her on, she added: "Let us soon see you, sir."

Bewildered, as by an apparition, Raymond stood looking after the two ladies as long as he could see them. Then heaving a long sigh, he murmured: "I could make her love me, I am sure of it."

To persist in his previous resolutions with such a hope in his heart, the

young man must have been very differently made from what he was. "It is no use to struggle against Destiny!" he said, aloud—and these words admitted his defeat. "I shall remain!" he added, in a defiant tone.

All recollection of the task he had undertaken, the remembrance of his murdered father, and the unpunished assassins, the fear of his mother's cutting reproaches, the thought of the disapproval and surprise of his friends—the Cornevins, Roberjot and Ducoudray, everything vanished, and while he retraced his steps to the Rising Sun, he said: "What does it matter if Simone loves me!"

Like an invalid who is determined not to think of his fatal malady, Raymond resolved not to brood over the past, and so at dinner, his face was gay and hopeful. Instead of sitting silently wrapped in dreary thought he talked and laughed, and, when coffee was served, he said to the baron: "Shall we go to Maillefert this evening?"

The old engineer started, and after examining his young companion with some curiosity, and noticing the strange excited look in his eyes, he answered, quietly: "Yes, let us go!"

A warm welcome awaited Raymond at Maillefert. An old friend of the family could not have been better received. The duchess actually rose from her seat and advanced to meet him, saying:

"Here comes our convalescent. Do you know that we have been very uneasy about you?"

The duke who had returned from Angers, paused in a scandalous story he was telling to one of his friends, to shake hands with his dear Delorge. "We have missed you fearfully," he said, "on my honour we have."

Raymond, who was now in the possession of all his faculties, asked himself the reason of this surprising cordiality from mother and son, and wondered what could be their aim, for surely they must have one. With this thought he set himself on his guard. He looked at Simone, who as usual was very quietly dressed. Indeed, she always wore the simplest of toilettes, toilettes which looked almost poor by the side of those adorning her mother's friends, but she was radiant that night; her fair hair was almost luminous, and her eyes and complexion were absolutely brilliant. She reminded one of some portrait painted by the Titian, which had long hung in a corner in the shade, and was now suddenly brought forward into the light. "I did not really see her the other evening," thought the baron, "or it is an absolute transfiguration."

The Duchess de Maumussy struck him as less beautiful. Seated at a little lacquer table, she seemed absorbed in reading a number of the *Vie Parisienne*; but her eyes were really fixed on Raymond with an expression which, had he seen it, would have startled him.

"I think we had better have a little *bac*," said the young duke.

But the proposal was not a happy one, for that evening Madame de Maillefert had invited five or six noble ladies of the neighbourhood whom she was particularly anxious to enlist in her election projects, and this word "*bac*" caused them to compress their lips with disapproval. With a glance at her son, the duchess quickly rejoined: "No—no cards to-night; let us rather have a little dance."

The pianist, who sat dreaming in a corner, frowned, for he knew what a frightful task would now be his. He saw himself, the inspired but unappreciated genius, condemned, and not for the first time either, to play common-place dance music for the amusement of Madame de Maillefert's guests. He beheld himself, the composer of admirable melodies, reduced to

playing Offenbach, Hervé, and such like. However he dared not refuse, so he rose with a melancholy, martyr-like look, and walked to the instrument. "Play us a quadrille from 'Orphée aux Enfers,'" said his hostess.

Raymond at once asked Simone to dance with him. She hesitated before accepting the invitation, and her lips parted as if to say something; but she saw that all eyes were fixed on her, and so without more ado she accepted.

Raymond had sworn to himself that on this occasion he would not remain stupidly silent as he had done at the ball—and kept his word; but Simone did not seem to hear him. She only had eyes for the Duchess de Maumussy, who was dancing with Philippe de Maillefert.

When the quadrille was over, and as Raymond led her to her seat, she said, rapidly and in an almost inaudible voice: "You must dance with the Duchess de Maumussy!"

He looked at her in amazement. "You must," she repeated, and her eyes plainly asked: "Are you afraid?"

It is certain that she could have breathed no more distasteful command, for Raymond upon his way to the chateau had thought to himself: "I can contrive to avoid that woman."

However, he meekly obeyed Mademoiselle Simone, and went towards the duchess. Before he opened his lips, she rose and took his arm, as if she had been waiting for him. After a formidable series of chords the unappreciated pianist attacked a waltz. No retreat was possible, so surmounting his repugnance, Raymond encircled the slender waist of the young duchess; she placed her exquisitely gloved hand on his shoulder, and they waltzed off. At first they moved but slowly, but as the pianist quickened the measure, they turned with increasing rapidity. Raymond's brain was strangely bewildered by the motion of the waltz. He forgot where he was, and wondered if he were not a prey to one of those horrible nightmares which make sleep a torture. "Can it be I," he asked himself, "holding the wife of one of my father's murderers in my arms!"

However, they had only taken a few turns more when she asked him to stop, saying she was fatigued, although her breathing seemed as easy as that of a sleeping child. Raymond on his side was out of breath, and his forehead was covered with drops of perspiration.

"Do you know," exclaimed Madame de Maumussy, abruptly, "that the report of your magnificent alms has come to Maillefert?" She laughed; but it was not a pleasant laugh; and without waiting for an answer she continued: "You are very rich, then?"

"Alas! no, madame."

"Then your generosity is all the more creditable!" But this was not what her black eyes said, for they haughtily asked: "Why have you given away precisely the sum that I sent you?"

Raymond instantly understood that unless he wished to make her his enemy, he must find some plausible excuse; and so inspired by necessity, he replied: "I played the other night—for the first time in my life, madame. When I received your letter, I was in an agony of fear lest I had lost. What would have become of me in that case—I, who am but a poor engineer? so I trembled, lest this money so easily and rapidly acquired, might inspire me with a fatal passion for play. And if I gave it to the poor, it was so that I might have the right never to touch a card again, and yet not incur the risk of having it said that I feared losing my winnings."

As Raymond proceeded with this plausible explanation, the duchess's face resumed its usual expression. "This is the truth?" she asked.

"Ah, madame, why should I tell you a falsehood?"

She smiled instead of speaking: and as the music had finished, she took Raymond's arm to return to the seat which she had previously occupied. He already fancied himself free, and was manœuvring to return to Simone; but the duchess swiftly commenced talking again, so that he could not possibly leave her without showing excessive rudeness. Taking as her text what he had said about being a poor engineer, Madame de Maumussy questioned him concerning his affairs in the most friendly manner. How long was it since he had left the Polytechnic School? Where had he been? Was his position in accordance with his merits? Raymond tried to answer as if he understood her, but all the time he was watching Simone, who was so seated that he could see her in a mirror hanging behind Madame de Maumussy. However the girl's face only expressed a little annoyance—nothing more serious. Meanwhile the duchess proceeded with her remarks. The baron had informed her, she told him, that the authorities had been very unjust to his young associate, although Raymond's reputation was already well established as one of the best graduates of the engineering school. "Now was this true?" she asked. Fortunately a diversion came at this moment, for Simone was not the only person who had not taken her eyes from Raymond and the duchess. The baron also had watched them closely, and he was surprised to see his young friend talk so long with a woman whom he knew he disliked. "Perhaps I had best go to his assistance," he said to himself. And leaving Madame de Maillefer to the mercy of her rapacious guests, the placehunters, he swiftly approached the younger duchess.

"Did you not tell me," she exclaimed, as soon as he was within hearing, "that this gentleman was too modest in making his worth known?"

"I did, indeed, madame."

"Well, then, it becomes our duty to do it for him."

The baron smiled. "I am not in odour of sanctity," he replied, "and my recommendation would be quite without value."

"But I can do a great deal," eagerly interrupted the duchess; and at once, in her Italian accent, she began to boast of her influence over her husband, who was all powerful, she said, and who had too often used his influence to find places for persons of inferior capacity to refuse to serve a man of real talent. She declared that the duke would do what she desired with the greatest possible willingness. ♦

Raymond, whose thoughts may be easily imagined, made no reply, and the situation, despite the baron's presence, was becoming extremely awkward when the unappreciated pianist, ascertaining that the guests had danced sufficiently, closed the piano, and with an air of profound humiliation seated himself in his corner again. At the same time the lordlings from the neighbourhood took their leave. Madame de Maumussy saw that that the baron was waiting with polite impatience for Raymond, so she bid them both good night, but not without neglecting to say to the young engineer: "We will speak of this again. It will not be my fault if the future does not recompense you for the past."

Without knowing very well what he did or said, the young man pressed her hand. In the mirror he had just seen Simone approach her mother, say a few words and leave the room, but not without giving Madame de Maumussy one last, strange look. "I shall not see her again to-night," he

thought. "Why did she leave the room? I have been the victim of my own foolish vanity, and she does not care for me as I hoped she did."

Madame de Maillefert and her son, so haughty and indifferent generally, now approached the baron and his young friend, and did not let them depart until they had obtained a formal promise that they would dine at the château on the following day.

They started off, and as soon as they were alone, the baron asked Raymond—"Come, what is this charade they are playing in your honour?"

"Ah, I know no more than you, sir."

"You see, my dear boy," continued the old engineer, "you would be making a great mistake if you looked at their politeness as a proof of their regard and liking. Such people never take so much trouble without a motive. Have you any idea what it can be?"

"Not in the least."

The old engineer seemed to be thinking. He was piqued by Raymond's reserve. With that delicious lack of self-knowledge which even the wisest have, he exclaimed—"I never meddle with other people's affairs, nor do I wish to force your confidence; but I should not be true to the friendship I feel for you did I not say, 'Look out and be careful!'"

These exhortations were needless; for unused as Raymond was to drawing-room diplomacy, inexperienced as he might be in those miserable intrigues which are veiled by the politeness of good society, he understood that something strange was going on about him. An instinct, superior to all experience, warned him that he was threatened by some serious danger. But what could this danger be? Was it the Duchess de Maumussy whom he was to fear? If the vanity which lurks even in the most modest man's heart did not deceive him, the young duchess took more than a friendly interest in his welfare. Might it not happen that this interest had a different foundation to what he had imagined. Jean Cornevin's last letter returned to his mind. Had not Jean said Laurent Cornevin was in all probability living? And in that case the proof of Maumussy's and Combelaïne's crime still existed. Might not the assassins know this, and might they not be living in momentary expectation of being unmasked? If this were so, then Raymond asked himself if the Duchess de Maumussy had not possibly been sent to Maillefert with the sole purpose of deluding him by magnificent promises, and inducing him to abandon any intentions he might have formed of punishing the assassins?

"In that case," he thought, "Madame de Maillefert and her son are in the plot, and this would explain their advances."

But Mademoiselle Simone was not; for while she compelled Raymond to dance with their guest, she at the same time gave him a warning glance. "I must speak to her," he said to himself. "I must find the courage to ask her to enlighten me."

Unfortunately when he reached the château on the following evening, Simone was not in the reception room, where the guests usually assembled, pending the announcement of dinner, and, indeed Madame de Maillefert seemed very much vexed by the girl's absence. "She is insupportable," she declared, "with her mania for rushing about the country, as if she were a poor country gentleman, with all his business on his own shoulders."

Raymond was standing near the young Duchess de Maumussy, who instantly remarked—"It is strange, certainly; Mademoiselle de Maillefert has most eccentric habits for a girl of her rank and with such a fortune, too. For, do you know, it is said that she possesses eight millions, and that she will present this large sum to the man who is skilful enough to please

her." The allusion was direct, insulting, and evidently premeditated—and in fact as if the young duchess feared that she might not have been understood, she added—"A girl as rich as that ought to renounce all hope of being loved for herself!"

Twenty-four hours before, Raymond would have taken up the cudgels on Simone's behalf; but he was learning self-control and so he made no rejoinder. The dinner was not very gay, for only four or five of the Parisian guests, who had been invited to the château, now remained. The others had flown back to the capital with the first frost. And if the duchess still lingered in the country, it was, as she herself declared, on account of business matters. The evening passed without Simone appearing, although at eight o'clock she had sent Miss Dodge to inform her mother of her return.

"Is she vexed with me?" thought Raymond, as he entered the Rising Sun. "She evidently avoids me!"

The next day, however, when he called at the château with the baron he found no one but Simone in the room they were shown to. Did she expect him? This was certainly the baron's idea—for after a few words he approached the window and remained there, although it was quite dark. It is true, however, that by reason of the very darkness the polished panes of glass served almost as a mirror in reflecting the faces of the two young people. Raymond did his best to control his agitation, for was not this the occasion he had longed for? And he felt that he must snatch at it.

Hardly had he opened his lips, however, than Simone interrupted him. She was very pale, and the contraction of her trembling lips testified to her agitation. "Was it you, sir," she asked, "who, on the night of the ball, was shown into Miss Lydia's private sitting-room?"

"By one of your servants, mademoiselle."

"I know. My mother and I were in the next room engaged in a most painful discussion, and we undoubtedly spoke very loud."

Raymond turned pale. His indiscretion had been involuntary, and but for the baron he would have left the room at the first words that met his ear. He could not say this, of course, nor could he utter a falsehood.

"You spoke rather loud, certainly," he stammered.

"So that you heard all we said?" He did not answer. "Did you hear me?" insisted the young girl.

Never did the word *yes* cost Raymond so bitter a pang. Would she hate him for evermore? No. She looked at him steadily, but with no anger in her eyes. "And what did you infer from what you heard?" she asked.

"That your devotion is sublime."

"That is no answer," she said, impatiently.

Raymond was puzzled for a moment; but suddenly he exclaimed: "Do you mean that you wish for my advice?"

She leaned towards him with as much anxiety as if her future destiny depended on his words. "I do, indeed," she said.

He, too, had a strange feeling that his reply was of supreme importance both for himself and her; and so he carefully weighed his words. "Not only do I admire your course, mademoiselle, but I approve of it as the only one worthy of a Maillefert. Had I been asked by you I should have advised it. You consider yourself to be merely the custodian of the immense fortune bequeathed to you. You are right. This fortune belongs in a degree to the house of Maillefert, and you feel it ought to be expended to sustain the honour and glory of a great name."

The girl's eyes lighted up with joy and thankfulness. "Do you mean that all ought to be expended in that way?" she asked.

"Yes, every farthing."

"You really mean this?"

"I do, indeed, for on this I found my dearest hopes."

She stopped him with a gesture. "To deceive one now would be unworthy of a man who, hearing a young girl insulted, risked his life to defend her—and—I believe you——" As she spoke she held out her hand to Raymond, who clasped it in both his own. "Believe in me, too," she added, "only——"

She did not finish. All the blood in her heart flew to her face. Raymond turned and perceived the Duchess de Maumussy standing on the threshold. Had she heard anything? and had she purposely selected for her appearance the very moment which instinct told her was most fraught with danger for herself and her influence? She certainly seemed greatly disturbed. Her very lips were white. "Where is your mother?" she asked Simone.

The young girl hesitated. In fact she was afraid to trust her voice to speak. However, the baron came to her assistance. He bowed in the most deferential way, and replied. "The duchess and her son, so we were informed by the servant who admitted us, are engaged with two of the sub-prefects of the department."

This was true, as perhaps Madame de Maumussy was already aware. However, she laughed unnaturally and then dropped on to a chair. "How droll it is," she exclaimed, "to see this dear dear duchess and this excellent duke busying themselves with politics." Then, all at once, with the feverish volubility of people who are afraid of silence, she began to talk of the events now occurring in Paris. She could speak with authority on the matter, she said, for she had that morning received a letter from her husband. The duke had written that he was not satisfied with the way things were going. In his opinion the imperial government was getting into trouble. The emperor closed his ears to the advice of his old friends, and listened to charlatans and clap trap politicians. The influence of the empress had brought men who were unfitted for power into office.

"I was mistaken," thought Raymond, as he heard her talk in this fashion. "This woman was not sent here by my enemies. If she knew who I was, she would never speak like that."

Whatever the cause may have been, it was nevertheless certain that something had roused the Duchess de Maumussy from her habitual apathy and nonchalance. All her being vibrated, colour rose to her cheeks, and she panted for breath as she spoke of her husband and his friends, of the men in office, and the intrigues of the hour—her stinging criticism dealing in turn with the emperor, the empress and the court. "She knows everything," thought the baron; but at the same time he shrewdly suspected that Madame de Maumussy was merely talking to hide the real cause of her anger.

The proof of this was, that when her hostess entered the room with her son, the young duchess received them with almost insulting jests, respecting the long conference they had had with their political friends. Raymond and the baron were also able to measure the important position which the young duchess must occupy by the self-control of Madame de Maillefert who but gently replied: "My dear Clélie, you certainly have an attack of the nerves to-night."

"You are mistaken," answered Madame de Maumussy, with an unnatural laugh; "I was never in better health or spirits."

When our friends left the château an hour later, the baron was more puzzled than ever. "Well!" he asked, "what do you make out of all this?"

Raymond, who was in the seventh heaven, promptly replied: "This has been the happiest day of my life."

"The deuce it has!"

"Yes, I worship Mademoiselle de Maillefert, and from what occurred to-night I believe that she is not indifferent to me. Did you hear what she said to me?"

"Perfectly, and if French is French, and if I am not an old fool, she plainly asked you if you would be willing to marry her without a dowry."

Raymond's face was radiant. "That was just what I thought she meant me to understand."

The baron shrugged his shoulders. "And what then?" he asked.

Raymond looked puzzled. "In my opinion," he said, "Mademoiselle Simone's dowry is the only obstacle between us. If the dowry is suppressed, the obstacle ceases to exist."

"So you believe that matters will go smoothly now?"

Like all impressionable natures, Raymond could pass in one moment from the greatest enthusiasm to the most profound depression. "Mademoiselle Simone," he answered, in a troubled voice, "told me to believe in her, and I shall obey her blindly."

After this stormy evening, after Madame de Maumussy's strange behaviour, after involuntarily witnessing her semi-quarrel with the Duchess de Maillefert, Raymond was not without some anxiety as to the reception awaiting him on his next visit at the château. His anxiety was superfluous, however, for he was even better received than before. Indeed in less than a week he was made to feel as much at home at the château as if it had belonged to his own family. A future son-in-law could not have been treated with more delicate consideration, or with more charming attentions. The duchess no longer called him Monsieur Delorge, but Monsieur Raymond, and sometimes merely Raymond.

"She had better come out with it and call him 'my dear son-in-law,' " thought the baron.

Philippe's familiarity was even more remarkable than his mother's, and all the more significant as it was displayed abroad. Every day, after breakfast, he went to join the engineers at their work along the river, spending hours in watching their operations with every sign of eager interest. He walked with Raymond through Rosiers arm-in-arm. He drove him to Saumur and to Angers. He dropped in at the Rising Sun and shared his dinner, saying that the cooking was better than at Maillefert, and at last he even dragged the young engineer to the best café in the place for a game of billiards. Madame de Maillefert, on her side, was never so cordial as when she had strangers in her drawing-room. She then took occasion to show her intimacy with Raymond, and called him by his christian name. It was also clear that the duchess and her son purposely left him with Simone—for whenever they walked in the grounds Madame de Maillefert would invariably say: "Give your arm to Simone, my dear Raymond." She herself took the baron's, while Philippe offered his to the young duchess.

And regularly, too, did Raymond find himself alone with Simone. The poor fellow was almost frightened. He could not credit the fact that his path was so smoothened for him—he dared not believe that no obstacles would arise.

"You think it too good to last?" said the old engineer.

"I cannot comprehend it—that is what I mean," answered Raymond.

"I have not yet made up my mind what to believe," said the baron. "What I suspect is a different matter." But he would not explain himself further, saying that if he were correct, facts would soon speak for themselves.

However, the more expansive the duchess became, the more reserve did Simone show. The more ingeniously her mother arranged *tête-à-tête* meetings with Raymond, the more carefully she avoided them. She was rarely out of the shadow of her governess's skirts, and Miss Lydia now took part in all their conversations. "She hates me!" thought Raymond, in profound despair. "What can I have done?"

He thought she grew colder, paler, and stiffer each day. She rode about all day long, was rarely indoors, and was as busy with the people under her orders as any gentleman farmer. "Poor child!" said the baron; "they will end by killing her."

Her eyes were often red, as though she had been weeping, and at times Raymond felt he could bear it no longer—that he must speak to her. One day, finding her in tears, he exclaimed, regardless of the presence of the governess, "Either banish me from your presence, or allow me to share your grief." She did not answer, whereupon Raymond urged her to speak. "Who is troubling you?" he asked so fiercely that the governess started. "Do you think while I live," he continued, "that any one that breathes shall make you unhappy?"

But with gentle sweetness she interrupted him: "Do you wish to drive me to despair?" she murmured. "Do you wish to ruin us?"

"Us!" she said, "us!" Raymond heard it. "Can I do *nothing*?" he asked.

"Nothing."

"But this anxiety is killing me!"

"Do you think," she said, with her eyes fixed on his, "that I do not suffer also." But to all his ardent entreaties for an explanation, she would only reply: "I cannot—I have no right to utter a word."

Poor Miss Dodge looked on in wonder at this strange scene.

"You are pitiless, mademoiselle," stammered Raymond. "It would be even less cruel to banish me from your presence."

Simone checked him. "You are robbing me of all my courage," she said, "at the very moment when I need it most." And then, as if she were afraid of betraying herself, she took the arm of her governess and hurried from the room, leaving Raymond crushed by a sense of his own powerlessness.

He pictured Simone's situation, in which horror was increased by mystery; and he realized that she stood alone, without friends or advice. Hearing a noise, he suddenly raised his eyes. The Duchess de Maumassy had entered the room, and stood looking at him. He shivered, for, to his mind, her glance was full of cutting irony. This was the first time she had spoken to him since the evening she had behaved so strangely. "What is the matter?" she softly said.

Without pausing to reflect, Raymond walked towards her. "The matter is this," he said, "that I love Mademoiselle Simone more than life itself—more than all the world—that is, I cannot possibly bear to see her so wretched, and I am fully determined to discover who it is who is killing her by inches."

She did not flinch under his gaze. Not one of her eyelashes quivered. "Do you intend that for me?" she asked.

"Yes, madame."

The young duchess hesitated; but finally walking towards the door of the room, which had remained partially open, she securely closed it, and then returned to Raymond. "Have you sense enough left, Monsieur Delorge, to understand what I say?"

"I am perfectly calm, madame."

"Then listen to the advice of a friend. Leave Maillefert, not in an hour, but this very moment."

Raymond laughed. "Do I trouble you so much," he asked.

She looked at him haughtily.

"You!—trouble me!" she rejoined. Then, shrugging her shoulders, she continued more gently: "You think the young lady of the house loves you. Perhaps she thinks so herself. But you are both mistaken. True passion neither reflects nor reasons; but Simone has a calculating mind. If she really loved you she would say one word—only one word—and might be your wife. She will not say it!"

Raymond laughed again. "I am at a loss," he said, "to understand the motive which prompts you to tell me this."

The young duchess's eyes flashed fire, but she controlled her voice, and answered, in an under tone: "If you happened to be in a house which was about to fall, and a passer-by called out to you to take care, would you stop to analyze his motives. I am that passer-by. Your heart is too good, and you have too great a contempt for money to condescend to artifices and intriguing. You have no suspicion what persons who thirst for luxury and amusement may be induced to do. Don't acquire the knowledge at your own expense. Your place is not here. The more warmly you are received the more fear you ought to feel. Believe me, it is not mere life you risk."

If there was real commiseration in this woman's tone of voice, Raymond at all events did not perceive it. He imagined that she wished to insult him. And catching hold of her arm, "Speak!" he cried. "You have said too much—not to say more——"

But she disengaged herself, and, with a contemptuous glance, rejoined: "I think you are perfectly mad!" Thereupon she approached the piano and began to play in a loud key.

The more Raymond pondered over the mysterious words he had just heard the more gloomy his apprehensions became. Was Madame de Maumussy sincere in her wish to warn him, or was she acting a part? However, in either case was it not best for him to try and wring the truth from her? "Madame," he began.

But she did not seem to hear him; her fingers were darting over the keys with marvellous agility. Perhaps she really did not hear. Thinking this he went towards her, and gently touched her shoulder. "Well!" she asked, half turning to him.

"Have pity on me," he resumed.

"I shall tell you no more—it is useless to urge me." Then, as she saw that Raymond determined to persist, she added: "Very well, I abandon the field!" And she left the room humming an air from the opera she had been playing.

Raymond hesitated. Fortunately a ray of sense was left him, and he determined to go off at once. In the vestibule he met the Duchess de

Maillefert, who was taking leave of an old lady who had been paying her a visit. As soon as she saw Raymond she exclaimed : "You are not going yet, surely !"

He did not answer her, however, but rushed down the steps and thence along the avenue. It seemed to him that he was treading upon a board stretched over an abyss—a board that was bending and cracking beneath him. And meanwhile a voice sounded in his ears—the voice of conscience—declaring that he deserved his fate—he, the son of General Delorge—for mingling with the folks who were the friends of his father's murderers. On reaching his room at the inn he spent hours in alternate fits of despair and rage, when suddenly the door opened and the baron appeared. "I have just come from Maillefert," he said, "and I left everyone in great surprise at your sudden disappearance. I am not curious——"

Raymond turned towards him. "You shall know everything, sir," he said.

And then, with the most punctilious exactitude, he related his interviews with Simone and the young duchess.

The baron listened, and when Raymond had finished, "Fire and fury," he exclaimed. "Nervous, excitable people like yourself ought to stay at home."

"That is a very easy thing to say, sir. But what would you have done in my place ?"

"I should have taken good care not to offend Madame de Maumussy."

"That woman is my enemy, sir."

"I dare say. But the duchess is an Italian—that is to say, a woman who yields to impressions of the moment—who, instead of analyzing her emotions, allows herself to be carried away by them. Take my advice. Go back to the château, as if nothing had happened."

And, to all appearance, nothing had ; for when Raymond appeared at Maillefert, the next day, all was calm as usual. "Have you seen Philippe ?" asked the duchess.

"No, madame."

"He has gone to the station to meet our friends, who are coming by the nine o'clock express."

"You expect guests, then ?"

"Yes," she said, "we are expecting my dear Clélie's husband, the Duke de Maumussy, who will bring with him the famous architect, Monsieur Verdale, and the Count de Combeldaine as well."

At any other time Raymond would have been crushed by the mere mention of these names. But human nature like steel plunged red-hot into an icy torrent, sometimes acquires superior qualities of resistance and elasticity and is at times endowed, by suffering, with marvellous energy. Thus Raymond turned pale, but his voice was steady as he replied : "You expect them to-night, then ?"

Madame de Maillefert looked at the clock. "They will be here in less than an hour," she replied. And she immediately began a most enthusiastic panegyric of the Duke de Maumussy, whose chivalric character and extraordinary political abilities she professed to admire very much. Combeldaine also had her respect as a devoted servant of the empire—an heroic soldier, ready to pour out his blood for his country ; in fact he reminded her, she said, of one of those loyal cavaliers who in knightly times asked, in dying, to be buried at the feet of the sovereign they had served.

Sufficiently master of himself not to go off again in a fury, Raymond

approached the sofa where Simone sat near a little work-table. Still he did not get rid of the duchess, who with a great display of animation went on to describe the merits of the great architect Verdale, the self-made man who by reason of his talents, had reached the highest rank in his profession, and made an immense fortune. She was thinking of making some changes at Maillefert, and M. Verdale would give her some ideas.

On hearing this Simone looked up in such evident surprise that her mother was quite disgusted. "Yes indeed," she continued, in a determined tone; "Yes; these old barracks must be made more habitable. I have reasons for thinking that the year 1870 will not elapse without her Majesty the Empress doing our house the honour of spending a day or two in it."

But Raymond did not hear her. He was watching the clock and calculating how many minutes longer he could venture to remain at the château.

"Do you know, dear Clélie," asked the duchess, "how many days your husband proposes to give us?"

"No; he has not told me," replied Madame de Maumussy looking up from a paper she was pretending to read.

Raymond must go in ten minutes. He glanced around the room, which to him was sanctified by so many hours of hope. He looked at Simone, who was industriously engaged, not with some useless delicate work, but in sewing some baby linen, which she had promised to a poor girl. At last the clock struck nine, and Raymond rose.

"Do not go yet," cried the duchess; "wait and see our friends."

"Impossible, madame; the baron is expecting me."

"In that case," replied Madame de Maillefert with a charming smile, "I will not detain you. But come to-morrow."

He bowed without a word; faintly pressed the hand which Simone extended to him, and then departed. The night was dark and cold; the sky black with clouds, and a furious wind was tearing through the trees. Raymond gave full vent to his rage as soon as he was out of doors. But as he reached the suspension bridge he paused—a carriage was rapidly approaching, and inside, by the light of the lamps, he could distinguish four men—M. Philippe and his friends.

III.

It was nearly midnight when Raymond entered the Rising Sun, where Master Béru sat in the kitchen making up his accounts. On seeing the young fellow he exclaimed; "Please go to the baron at once, sir; he is very impatient to see you."

Raymond found the baron walking up and down the large sitting-room. "At last!" exclaimed the old gentleman. "You can't retreat now! You are in for it!"

"What is the matter?"

"Something serious. Your dear Duchess de Maillefert deserves—well, never mind. Sit down; we must talk together."

But as he was a prudent man, he began by assuring himself that all the doors were carefully closed, and that no one was listening, after which he returned to his companion. "You know," said he, solemnly, "that it is a rule of mine never to meddle with other people's business."

Raymond had many a time smiled at his superior's self-delusion in this

respect, but he was not in the mood to do so now. So he waited for more to come.

"For your sake," continued the baron, "I shall do violence to the principles of my whole life. We have now lived together for months. I have realized that you are generous, loyal, and sincere—too sincere in fact. And so I have become—what shall I say—accustomed—no interested—yes, interested in you as if you were my son."

All these preliminaries on the baron's part ought to have startled Raymond, but he simply replied: "I will listen to you, sir, as if you were my own father."

The baron walked up and down the room for a moment and then suddenly stopped short. "This a matter in which your honour is involved," he said.

"My honour!" exclaimed Raymond.

"Yes; there is not a minute to lose. No time for hesitation or temporizing. To-morrow you must go to Maillefert, and formally ask the Duchess de Maillefert to give you the hand of her daughter, Mademoiselle Simone."

"What on earth do you mean?" cried Raymond.

"I mean what I say—it must be done," answered the baron. "It is absolutely the only way by which you can retain one ray of reputation and escape from the shameful snare which has been laid for your too confiding feet."

Raymond passed his hand over his brow. "I hear you, sir," he said, "but I do not understand you."

"And to think," continued the baron, sadly, "that it was I who encouraged you to love Mademoiselle Simone. Fool that I was! It is to-day reported throughout the district, at Saumur and even at Angers, that Simone de Maillefert is your mistress."

Raymond started to his feet. "This is the result of that Bizet de Chenellutte's cowardly slander," he cried in a hoarse voice.

But the baron stopped him. "Bizet is a fool," said he, "and his words have no weight. If Simone has lost her reputation it is through her own mother. I mean what I say. The duchess has openly declared not to one person, but to several that she hoped to induce you to marry her daughter—although you had seduced her, and were now tired of her."

A frightful cry of rage burst from Raymond's lips. "Never!" he exclaimed, "No mother ever said such a thing."

"She did say it—I know she did!"

"Very well, then. In that case I shall not defer going to the château until to-morrow; I shall go there to-night. I will tear this miserable woman's tongue out, and nail it to the door."

This explosion of despair was anticipated by the baron, who caught hold of his young companion's hand. "Before you do anything," he said, "you must listen to me. Listen and decide for yourself. It is more than a month, is it not, since Madame de Maillefert made such extraordinary advances to us that our suspicions were awakened? Did I not say to you at the time that my suspicions were of an odious character?"

"Yes, you did."

"Very well. From that hour all my powers of perception have been on the alert. Not a day has passed without my trying to solve this mystery, and that is why you have seen me hovering around Madame de Mauvussy, for I thought she knew the truth."

"And she did, of course?"

"No; she was ignorant of it until three days ago, I am sure of that.

When she learned it I can't precisely tell. She may have been her hostess's unconscious accomplice. At all events, as soon as she knew it she advised you to fly."

"Proceed," said Raymond.

"As I could discover nothing from her," continued the baron, "I looked elsewhere. My foolish title and my family connections opened the doors of several houses in the neighbourhood to me. I made everybody talk about the Mailleferts, hoping to glean an item of intelligence here and there, and which, added together, might prove important."

"Ah," murmured Raymond, "how shall I ever repay you?"

"By allowing me to be your guide, my dear boy. But wait—I lost all my trouble until this very evening, when I called at the house of Madame de Laclère, that lady, you remember, whose husband wants to be made a prefect—'Your young colleague is behaving disgracefully,' she said to me, in a severe tone. Feeling that I was on the track, I fortunately contented myself with an inane smile. 'How so?' I asked, 'Oh! you need not be so cautious with me,' she replied, 'for I know everything.' I bowed. 'In that case, madame, you are wiser than I,' I said, whereupon she laughed. 'My dear baron,' she continued, 'it was the duchess herself, who, in an agony of grief, confided her daughter's situation to me, and told me of the efforts she was making to induce the man who had seduced her to marry her, late in the day as it was.'"

"The woman lied!" cried Raymond.

The baron shook his head. "So I thought myself at first, and indeed I allowed her to see that I doubted her. But she declared that she was not the only person to whom Madame de Maillefert had made this most incredible revelation, and to prove it to me she called one of her friends, who she said knew the same thing from the same source. As I still seemed to doubt, she then summoned her husband, who assured me that he had heard from the son the same story that his wife had heard from the mother."

"What! from the duke?" cried Raymond. "Simone's brother? But why," he exclaimed—"why this abominable slander?"

"Why? Because the duchess and her noble son have nothing but Simone's income to live upon. If she marries they are lost. They intend that she shan't marry—and this is why I want you to go to-morrow and ask for Mademoiselle Simone's hand."

Raymond hesitated. "I am at this moment in a most horrible state of perplexity," he stammered. "I am not free to do as I should like."

The baron looked aghast. "Can you hesitate?" he cried.

"Ah! if you knew the truth," exclaimed Raymond; and this time, carried away by the situation, he confided his whole story—the story of his father's murder, and his mother's hopes of vengeance—to his old friend.

"I understand," said the baron, when the young man had finished speaking. "I now see the reason of all your strange hesitation. But you must not waver. There is no reason in the world strong enough to let a pure young girl remain for a moment under such an infamous accusation."

"You are right. I will do exactly as you advise," said Raymond, and they parted for the night.

Day was beginning to break, gray and sad, when Raymond awoke after an hour's heavy sleep. He felt utterly exhausted, but his head was clear and ready for any emergency. It was Wednesday, December 1st, 1869; that is to say, seventeen years previously, to a day, General Delorge had fallen the victim of cowardly assassins. And he, Raymond Delorge—he

who, on the lid of his father's coffin, had sworn eternal vengeance on his murderers, was on his way to meet them. But imperious, inexorable necessity required it—he must, before aught else, protect poor Simone.

And so, dressed in the traditional costume customary on such occasions, he started forth at noon precisely. "I shall go with you," said the baron, "but let us understand each other. I shall remain in the reception-room, and you must see the Duchess de Maillefert alone—my presence might make her angry—and you must force an explanation from her."

As they walked along, Raymond asked, "How do you think the duchess will receive me?"

"Who knows! Perhaps as a saviour. Possibly as a lackey."

"And the others?"

"What others? Oh, you mean those men! Let them rest for the time being. Besides, what do you care for such scoundrels. Hold your head high, young friend. It is for them to bow before you."

All the valets were in their places in the spacious vestibule. "They look more like creditors than lackeys," said the old baron; "and I should infinitely prefer to wait on myself than to be waited on by them."

The servants usually rose when Raymond or the chief appeared, but on this occasion only one of them shuffled to his feet. "Is the Duchess de Maillefert at home?" asked the baron.

"She is out," answered the valet, in the assured tone of a servant who has received his orders.

"Did she say when she would be in?"

"My mistress never gives any such instructions."

Raymond and the baron exchanged glances. "We will wait, then," said the old gentleman.

The footman answered in a most offensive tone: "I told you, gentlemen, that Madame la Duchesse was out, that no one knew when she would come in—or if she would ever come at all!"

The baron's face flushed. He asked Raymond for a card. "Take this," he said to the servant—"take this instantly to Madame de Maillefert; or, if she is really out, give it to her on her return. Monsieur Delorge wishes to see her as soon as possible. Now show us to the drawing-room."

His tone was so imperious, that the valet obeyed him, grumbling, "Well! I can't help it. She must say what she chooses."

As soon as they were alone in the reception-room, Raymond exclaimed: "Well, this is a good beginning!" But, before the baron could reply, the door opened again, and the same footman re-appeared. "Madame la Duchesse will receive the gentlemen," he said.

"Go," said the baron; "I will wait here."

It was in a sort of boudoir, between her dressing-room and sleeping apartment, that the Duchess de Maillefert received young Delorge. She had been dressing when the card was taken to her. Exceedingly angry, she sent away her maid, and contented herself with twisting her hair into a knot and assuming a pink dressing-gown trimmed with lace, which had once been magnificent, but was now faded and tumbled. Nothing could have been less attractive, less gracious, or less noble in appearance, than this woman disturbed in the great work of her existence. Without the artifices of the toilette-table she appeared such as she really was; such as she had become—thanks to increasing age, and thanks, still more, to powder and *rouge*, cosmetics and lotions. In fact, *fêtes*, excitement, the keen pursuit of money, financial anxieties, all the troubles of her stormy life, had greatly

impaired her once remarkable beauty. She was seated in a large arm-chair, with her feet on a cushion, when Raymond entered. She looked at him from head to foot as he approached her. "You are alone?" she said, in a sharp voice.

"The Baron de Boursonne is waiting for me down stairs."

"That is a great pity! I should have liked to compliment him on his charming ways."

"Madame!"

"Is he not your adviser?"

"He is my devoted friend."

"Ah! indeed! And it he then who teaches you to insist on seeing people contrary to the orders they give their servants?"

"It was necessary for me to speak to you."

"You could not wait a day, of course?"

"No, madame."

The lady shrugged her shoulders disdainfully, and settled herself in her chair. "Very well; then, now that you are here, say what you have to say!"

Far from disconcerting Raymond, this insulting reception only increased his coolness. "Madame," he began, "I belong to an honourable family. My father, whom I had the misfortune to lose when I was very young, was a general in the French army; my mother springs from the De Lespéran family, which is of good and old nobility. I am not yet thirty; I am a civil engineer; and I ask the honour of your daughter's hand."

It was with the bewildered air of a woman contemplating an absolute phenomenon that the duchess examined the young man.

"And it was to say this," she asked, "that you insisted on seeing me to-day?"

"For that only, madame——"

Raymond's coolness seemed to annoy her.

"Do you know who we are?" she exclaimed.

"I know, madame, that your daughter belongs to an illustrious family; that she is the descendant of a long line of loyal and valiant gentlemen, who have bequeathed from father to son a spotless name and pure traditions of honour and duty."

The duchess coloured, and eager to punish what she felt to be an insult, she asked: "Do you know what my daughter's fortune is?"

"Not positively, madame."

"But you have some idea, I presume. Let me tell you that her capital is about seven millions of francs. Rather a tempting amount, I think."

Insulting as was this speech, Raymond heard it, to all appearance, unmoved. "I await your reply," he coldly said.

"My reply!" she cried angrily. "Do you imagine, sir, that I attach any importance to such a preposterous request? Can you have really hoped anything from me?"

"I hoped nothing, madame." She started, and Raymond proceeded: "I had a duty to fulfil; I have accomplished it. I shall never speak to you again on this subject. I wished to give public evidence of my respectful admiration for Mademoiselle de Maillefert. I have done so. I have also openly expressed my intention of taking this step, and I shall as openly publish your reply."

He bowed, and turned to the door, but Madame de Maillefert stopped him. "What do you mean?" she asked, in a very different tone.

"What I say, nothing else."

"Simone has been talking to you. Simone sent you to me."

"No, madame, I swear to you that she has not."

"She loves you, however; you know she does."

For these words Raymond was almost willing to forgive the duchess. "God grant that you are speaking the truth, madame," he replied, in a trembling voice.

The duchess, who was pale and frowning, seemed greatly troubled, but all at once a sudden inspiration lighted up her face. "Wait a moment," she said.

"It is Simone who shall answer you herself."

She rang, and as soon as her maid appeared, she exclaimed, "Find Mademoiselle Simone, and bid her come to me instantly."

What strange idea had now entered this unworthy mother's head? Troubled beyond expression, Raymond felt that he should not be able to contain himself were Simone to appear, and yet he knew that he should more than ever require all his self-control.

IV.

"You love Simone?" asked the duchess abruptly.

"Madame——"

"My dear sir, your fate is in her hands. One word from her and I yield. It is for you to obtain that word from her." She checked herself and listened.

"There she comes!" she added.

Nor was the duchess mistaken, for Simone now appeared at the door of the boudoir. "Good heavens!" she cried, when her eyes lighted on Raymond, whose presence in the château she was ignorant of.

"Come in, Simone," said her mother, and the girl complied, looking from the duchess to Raymond with earnest inquiry in her beautiful eyes.

"My dear Simone," began Madame de Maillefert, "a most important event has just taken place. This gentleman has asked me for your hand."

The poor child's face flushed scarlet. "Mamma!" she cried, with a faint hope of recalling her mother to her senses.

But nothing ever checked the duchess when she had an aim in view. "I know by experience what a hell a home without love is, and so I desire, my daughter, that you should obey the dictates of your own heart. What shall I say to Monsieur Raymond Delorge?"

Confused, humiliated, and shocked, the girl dropped her head. "Have pity, mamma! Let us talk when we are alone."

The duchess shrugged her shoulders. "There it is!" she cried. "You always pass as a virgin martyr, and I am the victim, as usual. I wish that our conversation should have a witness, and I am very pleased that this gentleman is here."

Tears started to the girl's eyes. "Is it possible, mamma," she murmured, "that you are willing to admit a stranger to the knowledge of the sad disagreements in our family?"

"Oh! do you consider Monsieur Delorge a stranger?"

Raymond had just decided that the best course he could adopt was to depart, and these words decided him. "I will retire," he said. "Heaven forbid that my presence should ever be an annoyance to you."

But the duchess started from her chair and placed herself against the

door. "Stay!" she exclaimed, in an imperative tone. "Simone must explain herself once for all, this very moment." Then turning to her daughter, she coldly added: "Speak."

Anger had dried Simone's tears. "You wish me to speak," she said. "Very well." And she averted her face to avoid Raymond's eyes. "I consent," she added "to become this gentleman's wife, but only on the conditions which I stated to you before."

Only one reflection deterred Raymond from throwing himself at the feet of the trembling girl. Plainly enough the question of his marriage with her had been already discussed between mother and daughter.

"That is to say, on the condition that the ruin of our house shall be completed for this gentleman's benefit," sneered the duchess.

"Mamma, how can you say such a thing?"

"I only say what is true."

"How can you accuse me of ruining our house, when I have done all in my power to sustain it, and am ready to sacrifice everything?"

"Yes, everything except what I ask you. I ask nothing for myself, Heaven knows. I am an old woman, and only require a few thousand louis to pay my entrance fee at a convent. But your brother——"

"I cannot ——"

"Your brother is the head of our house—the heir of our name. Philippe is Duke de Maillefert, and you owe him respect and submission."

"Mamma, it is useless to insist."

Then the old discussion about money—the same kind of thing that Raymond had overheard on the night of the ball—began again; but, under these circumstances, how infinitely more degrading!

"Take care, Simone!" said the duchess at last, her voice trembling with anger. "Take care! You will compel me to give Monsieur Delorge a refusal." And turning to Raymond, she exclaimed, fiercely, "You hear her! You pretend to love her, and yet you have nothing to say!"

"I have faith in Mademoiselle Simone," he replied, using the words the girl had used to him. "Her decisions are sacred to me."

The duchess laughed aloud. "In other words," she said, "you love my daughter, but you love her money more. I expected this. I knew very well how much faith to put in your wonderful disinterestedness."

Simone raised her head, and when she saw Raymond turn pale under this insult she could no longer keep silent. "You may insult me, mamma, as much as you please; I am accustomed to it. But you must not accuse Monsieur Delorge of cupidity. It is more than I can bear. I know his feelings on the point. He thinks, as I do, that I ought to sustain the family dignity with all that I possess."

The duchess laughed her hateful laugh once more. "And this is why you refuse to give half of your fortune to your brother?"

"I do more than that now."

"How is that?"

"I give him—or rather you—my entire income."

"But keep your capital, and hold us at your mercy. If you should chance to change your mind some day, the Duke de Maillefert would be without bread."

"I never shall change my mind."

"Who knows? Let us suppose you married, and became the mother of a family. You would then begin to think that your money belonged more to your husband and your children than to your mother and your brother."

Mademoiselle Simone stamped her foot nervously, apparently forgetful of the presence of Raymond, who stood leaning on the back of a chair, listening. "I have told you, mamma," she said, "that I was willing to sign a paper which would ensure you and my brother the entire use of my income."

"Your income! Do you imagine that your brother could ever marry on such conditions? What family would receive him?"

"If my brother wishes to marry I will promise to settle half my property on his children."

The duchess curled her lips. "What a legal tone you adopt!" she said.

Meanwhile Raymond's admiration increased for Simone, while his contempt for her mother passed all bounds.

"What a head you have?" cried the duchess. "A will of iron—you are precisely like your father. Nothing moved him, nothing touched him—he would never bend."

"It is you, mamma, whose obstinacy passes all belief," said Simone, quietly.

The duchess turned quickly upon her daughter. "Enough! Once more, Simone, and for the last time, will you divide with your brother?"

"The capital? No, I cannot."

"Take care. Repeat this, and it is the immediate, irrevocable rupture of a marriage which you have at heart——"

"Ah! you are pitiless!" interrupted Simone. "You know very well that I am forbidden to do what you ask."

"Forbidden?"

"You know that I am bound by a solemn oath, sworn before God, on the hand of a dying man——"

The duchess shrugged her shoulders. "You always say the same thing!"

"Yes, mamma, and I always shall." As the girl spoke her beauty was sublime. "Do you forget my father's death?" she cried. "It was five years ago, to be sure, and many events have taken place since then, but I remember—yes, I remember——"

"Simone!" said her mother, fiercely. "Simone!"

But the girl continued. "I was not sixteen. I was still at school. It was a winter's morning, and I was still asleep. I was awakened by one of the under teachers: 'Make haste!' she said. 'Dress quickly. A carriage is at the door. An accident has happened to your father. He is dying.'"

"It was true; my father was returning from Nice, and on alighting from the train while it was yet in motion, on arriving in Paris, he was thrown down and crushed by the wheels. When I reached home the servants were wild. You, my mother, were at a ball, no one knew where. My brother had been away for twenty-four hours. My father was lying on a mattress on the floor of the drawing-room. Poor papa! He was in agony, and it was a wonder that he still lived and was conscious. 'Here she is!' he murmured, when I appeared. And all at once he gathered his strength together. 'Listen to me quietly,' he said. 'There is no time to lose. Understand me. I have made no will. With the exception of your share, my fortune will to-morrow be at the disposal of your mother and your brother. How long will it last? And when it is gone, what will they do? To what depths will they drag this glorious name of Maillefert, which is found on every page of the history of France—the name which my ancestors bequeathed to me without spot or blemish.'"

Madame de Maillefert tried desperately to prevent Simone from continuing

her narrative. "You forgot that we are not alone," she said with a threatening frown.

"You were the first to forget it, madame," answered the young girl, coldly, and addressing Raymond, she continued: "I knelt at my father's side. He said to me: 'Simone, you are only fifteen, but it is on you that I depend to uphold this house. Fortunately, on your side, you will be enormously rich, and this means salvation. As soon as your mother and brother have devoured their fortune, they will want yours. Refuse! Give them your income to the last louis. It is your duty to do so; but never, under any pretext, yield your capital. You will be tortured, harassed, circumvented, martyred. Stand firm, or I shall rise from my tomb to curse you! I urge this for your own sake and for the sake of our name. Protect your mother and brother from themselves. It may be that you will marry some day, but the man you marry must understand that your fortune is only a sacred trust.' His voice grew faint, but at a sign he made, I laid a crucifix on his breast. 'Swear to me on this to obey my last wishes, and I shall die happy!' he gasped. I swore. You came in that moment, my mother, arrayed in your laces and jewels, and you heard the last words uttered by my father. 'You swear it, Simone,' he said. 'All the income, if you choose, but only the income. The capital is the ransom of the Maillefert honour.'"

Unable to restrain her daughter, the duchess sank into her chair choking with rage. "This, then, is the motive of your conduct?" she exclaimed as soon as Simone paused.

"Yes."

"The mere ravings of a dying man."

So terrible were the girl's eyes that her mother shrank from them. "The dying man was my father," said Simone, "and the approach of death, far from bedimming his noble intellect, only made the future clearer to him."

Raymond still stood listening and praying to heaven to grant him an inspiration. "So prayers, remonstrances, and commands are useless?" resumed Madame de Maillefert.

"Perfectly so."

"You hope that your hypocritical obstinacy will triumph over my legitimate determination?"

"I hope nothing, madame."

The duchess did not seem to realize how ignoble and debasing this conversation was carried on in Raymond's presence. "Then it is settled?" she added in the same hoarse voice.

"Yes."

Madame de Maillefert turned to Raymond. "This," said she, "is the timid, submissive virgin whom you wish for a wife! How does she strike you now? Answer, sir, if you please."

Raymond choked down his indignation. "It is in vain," he said, "that I try to find terms to express the admiration I feel for the heroic devotion and noble courage shown by Mademoiselle de Maillefert."

The duchess had staked all her hopes on one single chance—and she had lost. Like the foolish player who tears up his cards and tramples on them when he has lost, she now quite ceased to curb her tongue. "Very well," she said. "Since that is your opinion I will detain you no longer, and I beg that in future you will not trouble me with your society."

Raymond bowed and was about to leave, when Simone raised her slender hand. "Stay!" she said; and turning to her mother she added: "I have not finished. You desired that the explanation should be full and complete"

The duchess replied by extending her arm to the bell-rope. "Take care!" said her daughter, in an excited tone. "If you ring, some one will come; and I swear to you that I will say all I have to say in presence of your servants, your guests, and my brother—in fact before all the people whom, without my consent, you bring into my house; for I alone have the right to give orders here, to receive whom I choose, and dismiss those whom I please." The duchess's arm fell to her side. Was this her submissive daughter who had now turned upon her? To what or to whom was she indebted for this new energy? "I shall speak," continued Simone, with strange vehemence, "because I owe certain duties to myself, and I wish it to be known how I have fulfilled my father's dying wishes. You and my brother have only too well justified his gloomy apprehensions. Three years had not elapsed before the enormous fortune my father left you was scattered to the four winds of heaven. In what mysterious gulf you buried it I cannot tell. You have not—for you could not—have spent it. There are reigning princes with a court and an army, who possess less means than you had. And yet when I spend twenty-four hours in your house in Paris, I cannot find among your fifty valets a servant to carry a letter—and your maids make me ashamed or afraid. One morning your cook came to me, saying that he could not give me any breakfast unless I gave him some money—that he had lent you eighteen thousand francs, and that none of the shops in the neighbourhood would give you any further credit."

"This is too much!" said the duchess, "too much!"

But undismayed the young girl still went on—"My father said that Philippe and you were mad. Millionaires as you were, you never seemed to have any money. You were always in debt and you borrowed at sixty per cent. when your creditors pressed you. To gratify a whim, you mortgaged your property. To pay a gambling debt you sold the best meadows in Anjou, far below their value. In one single night, Philippe lost one hundred and sixty thousand francs at *baccarat*; on another occasion, his losses exceeded ten thousand louis; and at the same time such were your personal difficulties that you sent your diamonds to the Mont de Piété. You have brought ridicule and shame on our heads—"

"Silence!" cried her mother. "You are mad!"

"I hear of you through the newspapers," continued Simone. "I never read them, but the people about here take a malicious pleasure in congratulating me on what they call your brilliant successes; and so through them and in this way I have heard a very great deal. I have heard my brother, the Duke de Mailfert, spoken of as a jockey, a vain and uncultivated fop, a gambler and profligate, and the dupe of all the adventurers who choose to flatter him. You, my mother, I have heard named as one of the queens of society, one of those who, as the milliners say, set the fashions—whose toilettes are described by journalists—whose beauty, taste, and elegance are lauded to the skies; and whose adventures and witticisms are in everybody's mouth. I have asked myself, on hearing all this, what sort of a mother you were to endure your son's conduct, and what sort of a son Philippe could be to tolerate his mother's behaviour."

Terrified at the sight of these two angry women, Raymond was almost tempted to try and silence Simone. Would she not injure herself and her own cause by this display of violence? "You shall pay dearly for this humiliation!" muttered the duchess.

But still undaunted, Simone threw back her head. Like a slave who has cast off his fetters, she seemed incapable of restraining herself. "At last,"

she continued, drawing a long breath, "your last louis was gone. You were ruined—your son and yourself. All your property that was not sold was mortgaged, money-lenders refused you anything more, tradesmen denied you credit, and, in utter bewilderment, you turned to me. For three years you had not answered one of my letters, but you came here one winter's morning—you did not recognise me—and you said, 'How you are changed, my poor child!'"

Raymond stood by the chimney, and he could see that the duchess's eyes were flashing with hatred. "I was changed indeed!" continued Simone. "I came here three months after my father's death, accompanied by Miss Dodge and Tardif, my father's man of business. I was only a child—I was ignorant of the value of money, and I knew nothing of the management of a large landed estate. You fancy that this exile cost me nothing. You are mistaken, for my tastes were then much like those of other girls of my age and station. I loved society, travelling, pictures, music, and pretty things. But I had a mission to fulfil—I wished to become the manager of Maillefert.

"Under Maître Tardif's guidance I learned the details of agricultural life. I rose at daybreak and overlooked my men. I learned the value of my crops, and, in short, in less than two years, when Maître Tardif died, I had made very great progress."

The duchess raised her hands to heaven. "How happy I ought to be," she said, "To have such an accomplished daughter!"

This was also the opinion of Raymond, who was touched almost to tears by the self-abnegation which the frail, delicate creature before him had displayed.

"The people about me," Simone resumed, "could not understand my conduct. I became the heroine of the most preposterous romances, while some persons considered me a phenomenon of Avarice."

"Let me congratulate you on the choice you have made, Monsieur Delorge," hissed the duchess at this point.

"And it was true," said Simone, "I was avaricious. I denied myself every superfluity or luxury, I economized, for I expected you, and you came. You were humble on that occasion. You made no allusion to complete and absolute ruin, you only talked of being momentarily inconvenienced. But I, who knew the truth, listened to you in sorrow. I entreated you to economize—to lessen your expenditure. I advised several things. You listened, and you promised a total reform, and ended by asking for four hundred thousand francs, which would release you from all your difficulties. It was an enormous sum, it constituted the savings of two years, and my reason told me that as for freeing you it was a mere grain of sand. However you were my mother, I was weak, and I gave you the money."

"And made me pay dearly enough for it afterwards," muttered the duchess.

To Raymond's surprise, tears came to Simone's eyes.

"The next day," she said, "I was obliged to go out very early. When I returned at noon, joyfully thinking of seeing you, I was told that you had gone. I could not believe it, for only the evening before we were making arrangements together for your settling yourself at the château. But it was true, you were gone, and you had left behind you a note for me, saying that a telegram had summoned you to Paris for a great charity ball. A fortnight later my brother wrote to me to send him twenty thousand francs for a debt of his. I sent them. The next month you wanted a trifle for dress-making—

five hundred louis—and thus, week after week letters kept coming, sometimes from you, sometimes from my brother, on different pretexts, but all of them pressing and crying for money, money!”

Disturbed by Raymond's fixed look, Madame de Maillefert turned her back on him, and with her hands clasped on her knee, beat time with her head to a tune which she hummed through her set teeth.

“This was the end of my peace,” resumed Simone. “Correspondence was not enough. You began to draw on me at sight. I soon saw that this would not do, so I wrote to you that I should not pay your drafts, but you kept on. I did not flinch. I refused to pay, and I was then beset by your creditors. At all events, you and Philippe had still treated me with seeming kindness. Sharp recriminations, bitter reproaches, and hard words did not pass your lips. But one day everything became changed, and you appeared before me with angry eyes and threatening lips. You did not say, ‘I beg of you,’ you said, ‘You shall—I insist.’ However I was firm. You had taken three years’ savings from me, and I asked myself if I ought to go on. I was even compelled to borrow for our needs here at the time. However, there then came other straits. You won some of the people of the neighbourhood on your side. They called me a child, and finally I agreed to send you ten thousand francs monthly.”

Madame de Maillefert wanted to seem deaf to her daughter's words, but these reproaches were too much for her, and she suddenly burst forth: “This is disgraceful! Ah! Monsieur Delorge, you remained here against my will. This audacity shall cost you dear.”

Meanwhile Simone continued: “Again your tactics changed: you were once more the tender, caressing mother, professing such fondness for me that you could not live without me. You sighed for the calm, peaceful life that might be yours if I would consent to live with you in Paris. You would be a changed woman, you said. I thought to myself that if I managed your house I could do more with two hundred thousand francs than you could with a million. My father had never spent two hundred thousand francs a year, and yet he lived like a true nobleman. However a few words dropped by one of the friends you brought down with you enlightened me in season, and I told you I could not leave the château. Your disappointment must have been very great, for your mask dropped, and you showed all your envy and hate. I saw that, in yours and Philippe's eyes, I was a legitimate prey. You pillaged me, you pillaged the château. You carried off all the pictures, rare tapestry, and carvings. ‘What good are they to you?’ you said, as you took them. Philippe carried off the portraits of our ancestors, under the pretext that they belonged to him, the sole male heir. I did not realize at the time that as many of them represented celebrated persons, he would sell them at a high price.”

“That is false,” cried the duchess.

“No, madame, he did sell them, and I bought them back. But why so horrified? You may surely traffic with the portraits, when you do so with the name you bear. Did not Philippe sell our name when he allowed it to be printed on the prospectus of some speculative enterprise? Did you not sell it the day you came here on this mission? You were paid, I know it; and if ever the Tuileries are invaded by a revolutionary crowd, your receipt will be found there.”

As pale as death the duchess now started to her feet. “I will not hear another word,” she said.

She had been kept in her chair by her determination not to leave her

daughter and Raymond alone together; but now, realizing that all her efforts were useless, she turned towards him: "You insisted on remaining here," she said, "against my will. I am but a woman, and I yield the place. Were I a man I should act differently." So saying she opened the door of her bed-room, but before retiring she turned, for Simone had just exclaimed: "I have yet only spoken of the past."

"What do you mean?" quickly asked the duchess.

"I have something to say of the present—of this last visit to Maillefert—of your attempts for the last six weeks——"

"Take care, Simone, you do not know me yet," interrupted the duchess, but seeing that her daughter was determined to proceed, she abruptly returned to her chair.

"On the very evening of your arrival," said Simone, "you said to me, not in these words, but to all intents and purposes, 'Give us the half of all you have and we will let you rest.' And but for my oath, most gladly would I have yielded. Rest! How I long for it! I promised to give you a hundred thousand francs for your *début* at court this winter, and I promised to organize the *fête* which would propitiate your mission here."

Raymond had heard a great deal, but he felt that there was something even worse to come. In fact, he noticed that the duchess was now rather anxious than enraged.

"This was our position, my mother," continued Simone, "when, on the day after your arrival, an event took place which will affect all my future life." She stopped, her voice failed her, and colour rose to her cheeks.

"Mademoiselle!" cried Raymond.

But with a sad smile she shook her head, and continued: "A young man of the neighbourhood, dazzled by my fortune, had annoyed me by his attentions and letters, and ended by a proposal which I declined. This person, Monsieur Bizet de Chènehutte, having grossely insulted me, a stranger took up my defence; and an hour after the scene took place, it was reported to your friend Clélie by her maid. It was in this way I knew of it, and knew, too, that a duel would take place on the next day. The ardent imagination of the Duchess de Maumussy was fired by the idea of a man risking his life for a woman whom he did not know. She kept on saying to me that such devotion was unusual. I was moved, touched, and grateful. There was, then, I thought, one being in the world who was interested in the poor deserted Simone."

"Simone!" exclaimed her mother, "you are ill, my child; you are not yourself to talk like this."

"That evening," the girl continued, "my prayers were longer than usual. I could not sleep that night. I rose with the dawn, and I sent Saint-Jean to make inquiries, and I discovered that my defender was one of the engineers who had been here for some weeks."

"Of course," said her mother, with a nervous laugh, "it never occurred to you to ask yourself if your unknown defender had heard of your fortune. Do you think he would have fought for a dowerless girl?"

Simone did not condescend to notice this insult. "As was only too natural," she continued, "I earnestly desired to become acquainted with this stranger who had thus undertaken my defence. Your ball was to take place, so I ordered an invitation to be sent to him."

"Simone! unhappy girl! By the name you bear, I command you to stop!" cried Madame de Maillefert.

The girl shook her head. "Yes, I know I am passing the bounds of

propriety. But is this my fault? It is you—my own mother—who have compelled me to defend my honour at the price of modesty. But you have compelled me to it—I shall tell the truth—I shall own that the first time I saw Monsieur Delorge I felt an interest in him. He understood my sorrows, and when Philippe was at the card-table that dreadful night, he realized what I felt. However, Monsieur Delorge did not please you, and the last of your guests had not gone when you began reproaching me bitterly for having compromised myself by dancing with him after refusing others. Perhaps you were right, for I know nothing of society and its rules.”

The duchess was wild with impatience, and yet it was clear that she dared not retire. “How long is this to last?” she asked, contemptuously. “It seems to me that this explanation may go on for ever!”

“The next day, mamma, all your ideas were changed, or rather the night had inspired you with others. You were now delighted with Monsieur Delorge. The most fulsome praise now followed scornful jesting. You wished him to be a constant guest at the château. You went in search of him. And Philippe agreed with you, as did all your guests, with the exception—let me do her the justice to say so—of Madame de Maumussy. My heart told me that there was some conspiracy started. Do you remember the day when you took me aside, and with caresses and tender entreaties, drew my secret from me?—when you said: ‘Very well—marry him. Divide your property with your brother, and I will throw no obstacle in your path!’”

Raymond, the duchess, and Simone were so excited that they forgot to reflect upon the strangeness of their position and conversation. However, the girl went on: “After having trafficked with everything else, you now began to speculate on my affections. Poor fool that I was! I allowed you to read my heart like an open book. I allowed you to see that I felt I had found in M. Raymond Delorge an honest friend whose arm would sustain me. You know that I said to myself: ‘He will accept half of the burden which I find too heavy. For my sake he will work for my people. He will aid me with his advice and energy, and save us all!’”

Raymond could no longer contain himself. “Ah! mademoiselle,” he cried, “you judged me aright.”

But Simone did not seem to hear him. Still looking her mother straight in the face, she continued: “I would not listen to your bargaining. I told you that I would pay no such price. You would not believe me. My energetic protestations only brought a smile to your lips, and you said, in an ironical tone, ‘You will think better of it when you realize that you cannot become the wife of the man you love in any other way. Some day you will come on your knees to ask my consent, and may be my terms will be harder than now.’”

“Abominable!” muttered Raymond, “abominable!”

“All this time,” continued Simone, “you, my mother, did your best to encourage Monsieur Delorge. I ought to have spoken to him then; but to accuse my mother seemed a crime in my eyes, and so I could do nothing but try to avoid him. I felt all the time, however, that everything was not yet finished. I felt that you had only closed your door to this gentleman because you had not renounced the hope of conquering me. And if my own presentiments had not warned me, your friend, the Duchess de Maumussy, would have done so.”

Madame de Maillefert started. “Clélie! Did Clélie tell you that——”

She stopped short. “Tell me what?” asked her daughter. The mother

did not reply. Then in a clear, full voice, vibrating with lawful indignation, Simone resumed the recapitulation of her wrongs: "That a mother, basely jealous of her daughter, should overwhelm her with insults, has been occasionally seen. That an extravagant brother should ruin his sister and take her last louis from her, may be imagined. And that a mother and a brother should league together against a poor girl, and murder her to gain possession of her money, is a possibility. But that a brother and a mother should deliberately, methodically, and with patent premeditation, dishonour their sister and their daughter, is absolutely beyond belief."

The duchess tried to speak, but the words expired in her throat.

"And yet this is what you did—you, my mother, and Philippe, my brother. You thought that between my reputation and the oath I had sworn to my father I should not hesitate, and that to regain my honour, lost through you, I should abandon the prize you coveted. And you went about with an air of the most hypocritical grief, saying that I, Simone de Maillefert, your own daughter, was the mistress of Monsieur Raymond Delorge."

Shaken from head to foot by absolute convulsions of rage, Madame de Maillefert tore the lace from her *peignoir* in handfulls. "It is false!" she cried "it is an abominable calumny! Never did Philippe or I say anything so atrocious!"

But Raymond walked straight towards her, and with flashing eyes exclaimed—"You did precisely say that to Madame de Larchère, and she repeated it."

"Madame de Larchère lied!"

"No one repeated it to me, mamma," retorted Simone, "I heard you say it."

"You heard it! Then why did you not deny it?"

The poor child shook her head. "What would have been the good? Because my honour was gone should I compromise yours? Who would believe that a mother could calumniate her daughter! I was silent, and if I have spoken to-day it is because you have compelled me to do so—it is because I wish Monsieur Raymond Delorge to know us as we are—you and I—before we separate for ever."

The duchess looked at Raymond and at Simone as they stood side by side. "You refuse your consent, do you?" she said. "Remember that the blame will be yours whatever may happen." And then she passed into her bedroom, slamming the door after her with such violence that a mirror was thrown down and shattered.

V.

SIMONE sank into a chair, hiding her face in her hands. "I am lost, indeed!" she cried.

Raymond repeated her words as if he did not understand their meaning "What a woman this duchess is!" he murmured; but suddenly remembering that these were the last moments he might ever pass with the woman he loved, he determined to avail himself of them. And he bent over her and tried to take her hand. She started and looked up at him with wild and haggard eyes. "You heard your mother?" he said.

"Alas! yes," gasped the poor child, between her sobs.

"She will never forgive your just indignation—she will never pardon you for having heard what she said."

"Never!"

"She will avenge herself in some way, and who can tell what terrible extremities her vindictive hatred will impell her to?"

"Alas!" the girl replied, "I have the worst to fear."

"Then, we must take a decisive step," said Raymond. "Do you trust me?"

She looked at him with grieved surprise and her face flushed. "After all that has passed," she murmured, "how can you ask that question?"

Raymond's heart beat quickly. "Then," he eagerly replied, "instead of acting on the defensive, attack. Madame de Maillefert desires your capital. Refuse her the income unless she gives her consent. Tell her firmly that she shall not have a louis until she had granted it."

Simone withdrew her hand. "No, I cannot do that," she cried.

"But it means safety."

"That may be, but it would also be answering their shameful behaviour by a shameful act. My property is not my own. I simply hold it in trust. It belongs by right to my mother and brother. I have no right to deprive them of it."

Hope fled from Raymond's heart. "You would not need to deprive them of it," he answered. "The very moment that your mother believes you to be in earnest, she will yield."

"Ah! you do not know my mother."

"I know that she must have money—that she must have it at any price."

"That is true; but her pride and her obstinacy are even greater than her covetousness."

"She will yield," repeated Raymond.

A bitter smile passed over Simone's lips. "You think me braver than I am," she said. "I could never have the courage to say that to my mother. I have never opposed her except passively. I ask myself even now how I have dared to speak as I have done to-day."

"Then you intend to remain here," asked Raymond.

"Alas!"

"In the power of a woman who hates you—whom no consideration can restrain——"

"Where should I go?"

A sudden inspiration, sent, as Raymond believed, directly from heaven, flashed through his mind. "Listen to me," he cried: "You can place this fortune in the hands of a man of business, who will manage it according to your directions, the proceeds to be devoted to your mother."

"And I——"

"You," repeated Raymond, and kneeling at Simone's feet he caught hold of her hands, and continued breathlessly, intoxicated with hope and love—"You," he said, "will take my arm, and this very moment, go with me out of the château."

"Go away with you?"

"Yes—I will take you to my mother, who is a good brave woman—to my sister, who is the best and purest of girls, and sustained by them, you will wait for the time when you will be able to dispose of your hand without your mother's consent." He forgot, poor boy, that only the evening before he had been filled with terror at thinking of what his mother would say when she heard of his marriage plans.

"It is utterly impossible!" said Simone.

"And why, in the name of heaven?"

"Because it would give to my mother's calumny an appearance of truth,—because these calumnies would follow me to your house—because Madame Delorge, who might be willing to give an asylum to her son's betrothed would refuse it to a woman who is called his mistress."

Hearing a door open, Raymond started to his feet. The duchess's maid stood on the threshold with a most detestable smile on her face, as she said: "I beg pardon—if I had known——"

"What do you want?" asked Raymond sternly.

"The Baron de Boursonne sent to ask, sir, if you had forgotten that he was waiting?"

"Tell the baron that I will be with him presently. Go at once."

She left the room, but her impudent smile stung Raymond like a poisoned arrow. "God only knows what this impudent creature will say," he remarked.

"My mother sent her, I am sure," rejoined Simone; and as her arms fell to her side with a weary gesture, she added—"What does it all matter?"

A conviction of his own powerlessness weighed like lead on Raymond's heart. "And it is I," he said, "who have brought all these cruel sufferings on you. It is I, who would give my very life for you, who brings these tears to your eyes. Oh! forgive me! I am mad and selfish. The very day when I saw you for the first time, that day when I knew I loved you with my whole heart, I ought to have turned and fled. Did I not know what fatal curse was on me? Has not experience shown me that I bring misery with me wherever I turn?"

Simone sat listening with colourless trembling lips, and a scarlet spot on either cheek.

"Yes, I ought to have gone at once," continued Raymond, "and one evening I said to myself I will go to-morrow. The morrow came, and I lacked the courage. My life had been one long agony. I saw all at once the sun of happiness rising for I loved you. I ventured to believe that I could win your love. I forgot all the past and the future in my new-born hope. At times, I unquestionably seemed very strange to you. I was strange—I was afraid of myself. I adored you, and I dreaded lest the secret should escape my lips, lest you should read it in my eyes."

Simone rose from her seat and stood leaning on the back of a chair. But he went on with growing vehemence—"I loved you and your mere presence paralyzed my brain. Under your eyes the words died away on my lips. The rustle of your dress sent the blood to my face. Ah! what violence I did myself not to fall at your feet and say, 'I love you! I love you!' Sometimes I fancied I could read in your eyes what I wished to read in them, and I left the chateau intoxicated with joy, to return and find but icy indifference, if not disdain." Simone tried to stop him. But he continued: "One evening we were with your mother driving, and she dropped me at the bridge. As I said good-night, you leaned from the carriage and extended your hand. I took it and fancied I felt a slight pressure, which I regarded as a promise and an oath. I stood in a sort of stupor watching the carriage drive off until you were out of sight, saying to myself: 'Is it true?'"

Blushing and confused, Simone's lips parted, and she cried: "Why should I be ashamed to own that I love you, Raymond? No, I am proud to own it."

Raymond turned pale.

"Great God!" he exclaimed, "I thank you. This moment makes amends for all the past." And delirious with happiness, he caught Simone in his arms and covered her fair hair with kisses.

But she quickly released herself. "Ah!" she cried, "do you not know that time is flying? Do you forget that my mother's hatred creates an unconquerable barrier between us?"

Raymond's face glowed with enthusiasm. "There are no insurmountable barriers to a love like ours."

Simone shook her head. "The doors of Maillefert are closed to you, and we are separated."

Raymond's face fell. "And you," he said, in a dreary tone, "are in the power of my enemies—in the same house as Combelaine, Verdale, and the Maumussys. But why are they here?" he asked abruptly.

"For nothing specially, I believe. Monsieur de Maumussy comes for his wife, and his two friends accompany him."

Raymond shook his head. "Your mother is unscrupulous. These men may be her accomplices."

"Forewarned is forearmed," answered Simone. "I shall be on my guard." But she stopped short, for she could hear her mother and Philippe speaking in the next room. "Fly!" she said. Raymond threw back his head haughtily.

"Yes, instantly!" she added. "Will you agonize me by letting me see you and my brother armed against each other? I will write to you; we will meet again. But if you love me, you will go now."

Simone was quite right. Had he found himself just then face to face with Philippe, stimulated by the duchess, there would have been one of those quarrels which can end only in mortal combat. Still he did not move. The word "fly" nailed his feet to the floor—for it seemed suggestive of cowardice. There was evidently an angry discussion going on between the mother and son, for they spoke in loud voices. Trembling like a leaf, Simone clasped her hands entreatingly. "Raymond," she cried, piteously, "pray go! Listen to me rather than to the dictates of your own pride."

He yielded. "I obey you," he replied, not without some bitterness. "I go—carrying with me the conviction that your honour, your life, are imperilled. How am I to know how you are?"

"You shall have word from me every day."

"You promise it?"

"I swear it?" answered Simone, raising her hand and speaking in a grave and ringing voice.

"God help us!" said Raymond, as he kissed Simone's forehead; "for He alone can save us!" And then he left the room in which he had been raised to the heights of joy, only to be cast down again to the depths of despair.

He tried to compose himself, as he expected to meet the assassins of his father face to face, and he was going slowly down the marble stairs when at a turn he suddenly came upon Madame de Maumussy. She had just returned from riding; her complexion was bright from exercise, and her superb black eyes, full of life and energy, sparkled under the brim of the masculine hat she wore. With one hand she held up her riding-habit, while in the other she carried her gloves and whip. Raymond stood against the wall to allow her to pass. But she stood still, and looked at him earnestly. "Why," she said, abruptly—"why do you look like that?"

Was this woman Madame de Maillefert's accomplice, and what part did she play in the intrigue which was progressing around Simone? This was what Raymond could not divine. He simply knew that Madame de Maumussy had been taken into the duchesse's confidence, and that he therefore, had no reason to conceal the events of the morning from her. "I look like this, madame, because I have just asked the Duchess de Maillefert for the hand of her daughter."

"You have?" cried Madame de Maumussy, starting.

"Yes, madame."

"And the dear duchess refused you?"

"She made impossible conditions."

A disdainful smile curled the lady's lips. "Madame de Maillefert exacted her daughter's fortune, probably."

"Her daughter's capital—yes."

"And you would not relinquish it?"

"I would not? Good heavens, madame!"

"Then Simone would not——" insisted the young duchess. And with an air of disgust she continued: "I am perfectly astonished at the rapacity and love of money which this family exhibit. They care for nothing but money, think only of money, talk about it, quarrel over it, and then are only reconciled through it. It is simply revolting!"

Raymond could not bear this. "You know very well," he said, "that Mademoiselle Simone is unselfishness itself."

"Then why does she not divide her fortune with her brother?"

"She gives her entire income to her mother and brother, but she is bound by an oath not to dispose of her capital."

The duchess shrugged her shoulders. "Say, rather, that she is determined to manage and control, save and order. She is just like the others in her love of money. An oath, indeed! Women who love don't care much for oaths. Simone has too much head to be endowed with much heart. She is one of those girls who, according to the chances of life, become heroines or martyrs; but wives or mistresses—never!"

Raymond shuddered; but to all appearance he was unmoved. "You hate Mademoiselle Simone," he said.

"I hate her! Why on earth should I hate her?"

Raymond could not tell her why, although he had a clear perception of the truth. "If you do not hate her," he said, "why do you speak of her want of heart? Why do you not come to her assistance? She is wretched."

"About as wretched as this marble on which we stand!"

"Would it not be a noble act on your part to help this poor child who is so abominably persecuted? You are all-powerful with your hostess. She fears you, and wishes to be on good terms with you." He was entreating her. He, the son of General Delorge, was imploring a favour of the wife of the Duke de Maumussy. "I am filled with fear," he continued, "when I think of the covetousness of the duchess and her son."

Madame de Maumussy averted her eyes. "Perhaps," said she, "if this young lady's security and peace of mind are of such importance to you, you had better give her up entirely——"

"And why? Give me a reason."

"I have none to give; but believe me my advice is good."

Raymond darted at the young duchess one of those searching glances which are calculated to draw the truth from the innermost depths of the

soul. "Can I believe in the sincerity of advice coming from you?" he asked.

"And why not? Ah! because I am the Duchess de Maumussy, and because I know your story, Monsieur Delorge!" And snapping her whip with an air of superb insolence, she added: "Am I responsible for the acts of the Duke de Maumussy? He is my husband, to be sure, but did I choose him? Do his hates or his likings affect me in any way? I am not Mademoiselle Simone; I am Clélie! What do I care for the Duke de Maumussy? Let me meet to-morrow a man whom I love and who loves me and you will see, duchess as I am, that I will take his arm and boldly proclaim him as my lover."

Her hearer was confounded by her audacity, for she spoke very loudly, in a clear ringing voice, careless of the fact that the hall below was filled with servants. "Believe me, Monsieur Delorge," she continued, "it is a friend who speaks to you. Give up Simone; it is for her interest and for your own that you must forget her." And without waiting for his reply, she gathered up the ample folds of her skirt, rapidly ascended the few remaining steps and disappeared.

The young man looked after her, utterly bewildered by the events of the morning. Was the young duchess mocking him, or did she love him, and did she hate Simone on account of that? Plausible as this last explanation was, he did not care to admit it, on account of the ridiculous position in which it placed him. "I see distinctly that she has something against Simone," he muttered. "But what? Who can divine what detestable ideas may have been put in her head by her hostess?" He asked himself why he should not fight his enemies with their own weapons. What prevented him from promising, and not keeping his promises? What prevented him from pretending to give up Simone, and attaching himself to the young duchess and extracting her secret from her? Yes; but Simone, so proud and dignified, would never lend herself to this degrading comedy, and he would be left to play it alone. Disgust would overcome him, and he would drop his mask long before it was time to do so. "No—no," he said; "better be dupes ourselves than that." And, in haste to quit the château, he hurried down the stairs, and crossed the vestibule to the room, where he had left the baron, and the door of which was open.

Seeing that his friend was there with two other persons, he hesitated. Near one of the windows there sat a man who was carelessly reading a newspaper, now and anon casting an impatient glance out of doors, where the rain was falling slowly but persistently. It was De Maumussy. He had aged considerably. His hair was much thinner, and very gray; his eyes had lost their cynical flash; his cheeks hung loose; while the deep wrinkles on his temples and his compressed lips revealed the devouring cares and anxieties of his brilliant and envied existence. Raymond's heart swelled with rage at the sight of this man who was one of his father's murderers; and averting his glance and looking towards the centre of the room he espied Verdale, Roberjot's former friend, talking with the baron.

Verdale was no longer the lank unappreciated architect, who had once dragged his huge portfolio full of disdained plans and sketches about with him through Paris. Success glowed on his face, and at each movement he seemed to burst with prosperity, like a bag filled too plentifully with gold. M. de Boursoigne was speaking to the architect in that tone of quiet impertinence which he always used with people who displeased him. "I have known you, sir, by reputation for a long time," he said. "The part you

played in the transformation of Paris is too considerable for you not to be well known. Besides, I have heard you spoken of by your early companions at school." Verdale's annoyance was very evident. "You have pulled down a great deal," continued the baron.

"Only where it was necessary, sir. Sunshine and air were needed—is it not health and wealth to let floods of light into the narrow, unhealthy, ill-smelling lanes of old Paris?"

"Yes, I know. I read that in the reports."

"Those reports were but the feeble expression of the truth."

"Oh! of course. I am inclined to think, however, that pulling down is better from a financial view than putting up. I mean it is more of a money-making business. I have built—Heaven knows how many bridges and viaducts, turned out any number of docks, and miles on miles of canals, but where am I? I have never made more than eight or ten thousand francs in a year."

"But you are an officer of the Legion of Honour!"

"And you will be one too."

"Very true; but——"

"Moreover, after pulling down more than I have ever built, you have made a fortune of several millions."

The baron thought he was teasing Verdale, in point of fact, he was positively torturing him. "Is success a crime?" asked the architect bitterly.

The engineer laughed. "Not in my eyes, I assure you; for I know nothing more respectable than a fortune honestly and laboriously acquired—one of those fortunes each silver-piece of which represents some task accomplished or some privation endured."

Raymond had heard steps behind him in the corridor. To have yielded to Simone's entreaties, and then to be found below by the young duke, was worse than to have remained up stairs. And surmounting the horror which M. de Maumussy inspired him, he entered the room.

The baron turned on hearing him enter, and exclaimed: "Ah! my dear Delorge, you have come at last? I really began to think you had forgotten me, and had gone off without me."

"Did not the maid tell you that I would be with you in a few moments?"

"What maid?"

"The same one you sent to me."

The baron looked quite wild. "I haven't sent a soul," he answered.

Simone was right, then. It was her mother who had despatched the impudent servant girl. But Raymond had no time for comment, for De Maumussy had laid down his newspaper, and coming forward said in a tone of the most studied politeness: "Monsieur Raymond Delorge, if I am not mistaken——"

Raymond recoiled involuntarily with the look of a man who sees a serpent rear its head in his path. "The son of General Delorge—yes, sir?" he replied. His tone was full of hatred, but the duke did not seem to notice it.

"Perhaps you do not recognize me?" he said, blandly.

"You are the friend of M. de Combelaïne, are you not? You are the Duke de Maumus-y, I believe?"

"It is a long time since we met."

"It will be seventeen years the day after to-morrow that I saw you for the first time, sir, and under circumstances that I am not likely to forget. It was three days after the murder of my father!"

Instead of evincing the slightest indignation, the duke shook his head sadly. "Ah!" he muttered, "still the same unjust accusation."

Raymond did not notice these words. "You then had the unheard of audacity," he continued, "to present yourself before my mother to offer her a pension—the price of blood."

"I obeyed the voice of my conscience, sir. A great and terrible misfortune had come to you, and I sought to soften its consequences as far as lay in my power. I should have been glad to serve you."

"Yes, so you said then. It was easy to say it to a defenceless woman and helpless child."

A faint smile passed over the duke's lips. "Excuse me!" he replied, "you had one defender, and a terrible one he was, too—an old servant, who threatened me with a pistol, and who really wished to kill me."

"And who, but for my mother, would have done so. You will never see death so near you again but once."

The baron was struck by the fact that the more excited Raymond became, the more conciliatory his antagonist showed himself. "Nevertheless," said the duke, "my feelings towards you are still unchanged. I should be as glad to serve you to-day as I was then."

"Nor am I changed!" Raymond answered, fiercely; "I believe to-day, as I did then—in the future. The distance which separated us then has diminished—you are not so high, nor I so low."

M. de Maumussy replied in a gentle tone: "Heaven is my witness that I came to you with the kindest motives."

"Kindest motives!" cried Raymond. "Have you forgotten everything? Do you forget that to-day is the 1st of December, 1869. Has no voice ever awakened you in the middle of the night with threats of vengeance? Have you forgotten that seventeen years ago my father, General Delorge fell—murdered in the Garden of the Elysée?"

But the baron clutched his arm impatiently. "Come," he said, "Come."

Raymond followed him to the door; and when his hand was on the knob he turned and said, in a low voice to Maumussy: "As for myself, I tremble at the thought of the reappearance of Laurent Cornevin!"

The servants had heard something of this altercation, and they looked after the two gentlemen with a singular expression. The baron was furious, and as they went down the avenue he exclaimed: "I swear, Raymond, I am almost of De Maumussy's opinion. I think you are mad. What on earth is the use of this quarrel—and these threats?"

"There is none, I suppose—but the sight of this man puts me out of myself. Any one less cowardly than Combelaïne would send me a challenge."

The baron shrugged his shoulders. "First of all," he said, "tell me what took place while I was waiting for you." And when Raymond told him he remarked: "Do you realize that a reconciliation with this man would insure your marrying Simone?"

Raymond started. "I never thought of that. But at that price! Never! I would sooner renounce her!"

VI.

THE two friends were drenched to the skin when they reached the Rising Sun, and Master Beru declared that he could not understand why they had not been kept at the château, or at least sent back in a carriage. "If

Madame de Maillefert's friends came down to have any shooting," he added, "they will have their labour for their pains, for the weather threatens to be very bad!"

The innkeeper had touched on the very point which puzzled the baron. Why had these men come to the château in the month of December? They had certainly not abandoned Paris, and their interests there, for the mere pleasure of travelling together. In fact, De Combelaïne and Maumussy hated each other cordially, and were only bound together by their past complicity. Verdale, moreover, had too often refused to lend them money to seek their society with any especial eagerness. There was some milk in the cocoa-nut no doubt, and their presence suggested the possibility of a new combination devised by the duchess, and directed against her daughter's fortune. "Why, too," thought the baron, "should De Maumussy have been so patient under the accusations which Raymond flung so hotly in his face. It was very strange. He evidently had an idea or the hope of a reconciliation. Or it may be that he has reasons which you are ignorant of for fearing you."

"May it not be," asked Raymond, "that he thinks the empire stands less firmly than it did?"

Early in the month of December, 1869, the gilding on many of the imperial idols had been roughly effaced by the talented pamphleteer Henri Rochefort. The Duke de Maumussy and the Count de Combelaïne had each had their page in *La Lanterne*. A terrible page, which particularized little, but every phrase in which was an accusation, and each word a threat. De Combelaïne wished to challenge Rochefort, but De Maumussy, on the contrary, affected to laugh, for he well knew how necessary it was for him to keep quiet, and prompt no talk about himself. Again, "the black specks on the sky," to which the emperor had alluded in a celebrated speech, developed into terrible clouds, charged with thunder and flashes of lightning. Once more did the government feel the periodical necessity of "doing something." Some were eager for a *coup d'état* to sweep away all the liberties which had been conceded after seventeen years' struggle. Others, on the contrary, wished "to crown the edifice," hoping that this erection, the Second Empire, founded on the bloodshed of December, would be solid enough to support the crown of liberty.

After dinner at the Rising Sun, while the two engineers were sitting by the fire, the postman brought in an extremely bulky letter. It came from Jean Cornevin, and was dated Australia, having been sent on by the obliging lawyer, M. Roberjot. "It seems as if no emotion were to be spared me to-day," muttered Raymond.

The baron took up the letter. "Shall I read it to you?" he asked, and hardly waiting for a reply he tore it open, and began to peruse it aloud: "To all my dear Friends—At last after hundreds of disappointments—after months of anxiety and suspense, I have something positive to tell. Read and judge for yourselves. The last time I wrote I was at the hotel in Melbourne, awaiting the return of Pécheira, the banker, from the gold mines. Twice a day I went to his office to know if he had returned, but the answer was always the same. 'We have not heard from him,' said one or another of the clerks. 'He may be on the other side of Ballarat.' I was beginning to think seriously of going in search of my man, when yesterday morning who should call on me but the head clerk. 'My master came last night,' he said, 'and he is waiting for you.' In a moment I was ready, and rushing through the streets, as if I were crazy, I entered Pécheira's office. I found him to be a very handsome fellow, about forty, with a keen eye, and

abrupt manners, but still with every intention of being polite. As soon as I entered, he held out his hand as to an old acquaintance. 'You are Cornevin's son?' he said. 'Which are you? Léon or Jean?' I nearly fell from my chair at the idea of this man knowing our names. 'I am Jean, sir,' I said. He smiled. 'Then you are the painter?' 'How do you know that?' I asked. 'I do know it, and in the same way I know that your brother has been educated at the Polytechnic School, and is now an engineer; that your good, worthy mother has a dressmaking establishment in the Rue de la Chaussée d'Antin; and that you have three sisters, three charming young girls, called Clarisse, Eulalie, and Louise.' He then went on to speak of the noble courageous woman, the wife of General Delorge—of our friends Doucoudray and Roberjot. Upon my word, my dear friends, I did not know whether I was asleep or awake. 'You ask me,' continued Pécheira, 'how I know you all so well. Good heavens! how shouldn't I know something about the family of a man with whom I lived for years like a brother; with whom I have shared dangers and privations, hopes and success—particularly when this man lived, as your father did, only for his family.'

'I was confounded. 'Sir,' I said, 'when my father was taken from us, my mother was in profound distress; there were five of us—the eldest not ten.' Pécheira interrupted me. 'I know that,' he said, 'and this thought nearly killed your father during the two years he heard nothing of you—during the time he obtained no word of reply to all the letters he wrote to your mother.' 'We never received one,' I replied. 'That is just what Cornevin thought,' said Pécheira. As soon as possible he took the only means in his power to ascertain what had become of you. He learned that a providential hand had been extended to you, and that General Delorge's widow had been your salvation. 'Every drop of blood in my veins belongs to her!' he said to me often. He never lost sight of you after that. Day by day, so to speak, he heard of you. We were not together at that time, but he came to visit me every month. 'My wife is making money,' he said, rubbing his hands. 'Her business prospers, and God blesses her labours.' Another time, he remarked. 'My son Léon has just entered the Polytechnic School,' or 'My son Jean has decided talent—he has exhibited a picture which has had a great success.' You were his one thought, and presently I will show you the portraits of you all, with those of Madame Delorge and her son—of M. Ducoudray even; and you will find in my drawing-room the landscape which had such success at the exhibition, and which your father bought."

Great as had been Jean Cornevin's astonishment, it did not equal Raymond's. He, too, asked himself if he were wide awake. But it was no use for him to try to speak, for the baron would not bear any interruption, but hurried eagerly on, with the haste of a man who seeks the denouement he has foreseen.

"The more evidence I saw of my father's affection," wrote Jean, "the more puzzled I was that he should be willing to live apart from us. Pécheira read all this in my eyes. 'We have a great deal to say to each other,' he exclaimed, 'and I have an engagement now. Go back to your hotel and send your baggage here.' I demurred to this. 'Nonsense,' he said. 'The son of Laurent Cornevin can live under no other roof than mine while in Melbourne. My house is yours—do you understand? Do as I say, and make haste. At eleven o'clock I shall be at liberty, and we will breakfast together.' It was then nine. An hour later I had paid my bill and was installed in a comfortable room in Pécheira's house."

"We ate our breakfast, and when the servants had left the room and the doors were closed, my host said, 'Now I will tell you all I know. My father told you how Cornevin came to Talcahuana, under the name of Boutin. He was half famished and in rags, and he asked for work as if it had been alms; and having found it with us, he remained. Never had I seen such industry. To return to France was his one idea, and it was to enable him to do so that he worked with such fierce energy, depriving himself of even the necessities of life rather than diminish his small stock of coin. But money was not made quickly at Talcahuana, and poor Laurent remarked, 'I shall never get enough together to pay my passage.' He lost heart and even at one time, as he told me later, he was tempted to commit suicide. But he heard me say something about going to Australia, where, according to what was said at Valparaiso, nuggets lay like pebbles on the soil. I had had this idea of going to Australia for some time; but my father objected, saying that it was folly to go so far. But when I once get a thing into my head, it is not so easily got out again, and when my father saw this, he gave me leave to go. 'Very well,' I answered; 'I'll do so and I'll take Laurent with me.'

"On the Monday following we left Talcahuana. My father at the last moment regretted the counsel he had given, and did not fill my purse to repletion. He hoped, as he since wrote, that I should spend everything at Valparaiso, and return to him in a month's time. In fact, Laurent and I had but three hundred piasters between us. At Valparaiso we had the greatest difficulty in finding a ship that would take us. But when a man is determined on a thing he generally succeeds in achieving it. An English captain, half of whose crew had been killed by yellow fever, took us on board—Laurent as sailor and I as cook. We asked no wages; we only wanted to be landed in Australia, and six months later, indeed, we touched ground on the unfinished dock of Melbourne.

"I wished to make money, so did your father, and he said to me the very first evening: 'We must not lose time in Melbourne—let us leave tomorrow for the mines.' We did so—and I will take you to the very spot, where Ballarat now stands, a town which sprang to life, as it were, at the whistle of a machinist, and which to-day numbers thirty thousand inhabitants, and which, like Melbourne, has its thoroughfares lighted with gas, its handsome shops, squares and exchange, its theatres and railway stations. As we saw it, however, it was a strange spot, dug and upheaved by the hand of man, with each little hillock turned over, and scrutinized, each grain of sand examined, washed and sifted—and all this to the roar of machinery, and the noise of pumps and hammers.

"In those days there was no railroad, so we trudged along a dusty highway dotted with horrible taverns noisy with drunken cries and songs. The whole valley of Ballarat was an immense camp, where all the miners herded together. Terrific looking creatures they were, too, covered with mud and dripping with sweat, wandering with a pick-axe in one hand and a revolver in the other, about the country. Neither Laurent nor I were very delicate. We were accustomed to lives of privation and fatigue. We had both been accustomed to the sight of the drags of humanity, at least. Nevertheless we were frightened at what we now beheld and were forced to undergo. However, we heard that only the night before an old miner had found a nugget of gold weighing two thousand six hundred ounces and worth two hundred and sixty thousand francs. 'We must stay here,' we said to each other, 'and hope for that fellow's luck!' It is true that precisely

at the same moment a hundred thousand other miners said the very same thing, and that this terrible concurrence singularly complicated the task.

"At the beginning we were far from successful. All around us men were growing rich while we found nothing but gravel. But Laurent broke the charm that held us, and one night, after a hard and fruitless day's work, he found a nugget worth five thousand francs. He was overjoyed. 'Four like these,' he said, 'and I start for home.' He was then satisfied with the idea of making enough money at the mines to pay the expenses of the voyage and have a couple of thousand francs in his pocket when he arrived in Paris. 'With that much,' he said, 'I can do what I want.' However he spoke to me less often about his family than before. In despair at not having received any reply to the letters he had written, he had ceased to write himself. 'My poor wife,' he said bitterly, 'courageous and good as she has been, must be dead by now and my children are street vagabonds, if not in prison.' And he added with a frantic air: 'But they shall pay for it, the whole lot of them. To work! to work!'

"Three months later, and we had twenty thousand francs in our common purse, but we met with a terrible misfortune. Our treasure, which we were obliged to keep on our persons, had become a serious inconvenience, and it was decided that Laurent should place it in safety at Melbourne. He started, but was attacked on the road, wounded, robbed, and left half dead. We were ruined, and had to begin again. Another time I got carried away at the gambling table, and lost the fruit of six weeks labour. Nevertheless despite all these disasters we had forty-three thousand francs at the end of a year's time. We divided this sum, and Laurent started to Melbourne to find a vessel about to sail. He said to me, when I stood on the dock just before he went on board the 'Moravian': 'Read the French papers carefully. Before long there will be mention made of Laurent Cornevin.'"

Thus it came to pass that, by dint of careful researches, all these thousands of leagues away in Guyane, Chili, and Australia, Laurent Cornevin had been traced through the first four years of his disappearance.

"It is the hand of Providence;" said Raymond, but the baron made no reply. After taking breath, he continued to read Jean's letter. "Pécheira went on to say: 'What Cornevin's plans were he never confided to me in so many words, but I thought I understood them. I knew that he was the one witness of a great crime, and that the authors of the crime had him transported to Guyana. Twenty times and more I had heard him swear vengeance. And knowing his energy and determination, I felt certain that he was meditating some tremendous punishment—as terrible as had been the crime, and that he was only awaiting his opportunity to strike at the scoundrels who had so long enjoyed impunity. It was, therefore, with the greatest attention that I read the Paris papers, the date of which according to my calculations, corresponded with Cornevin's arrival in Paris. But I found nothing in them whatever. I felt surprised at first, and then anxious. I knew that the 'Moravian' had made a very rapid passage, and that none of her passengers had died, so that Laurent must have reached Paris. What had happened to him? Knowing that the people he intended to attack were rich and powerful, and connected with the government, I said to myself: 'Laurent has been guilty of some gross imprudence in some way. He has been again arrested, and is, perhaps, at this very moment on his way back to the Devil's Island with such especial directions that he will certainly never again be able to escape.' I cannot say that I forgot him. That I never can do; but as the months went by he was naturally less in my mind."

"He had been gone nearly a year, when one morning the door opened, and in he walked. I cannot attempt to describe my astonishment. 'Laurent!' I exclaimed, 'havn't you been to France?'"

"'Yes,' said he, 'and staid there four months.' 'And your wife and children?' I asked. 'God has taken care of them. They are well and happy,' he answered. 'You have brought them out here with you?' I asked again. 'I! I have not even spoken to them or embraced them.'

"Knowing the great love Laurent Cornevin felt towards his wife, whose very name made him turn pale, and his children, whom he never spoke of without tears in his eyes, I thought he was jesting. 'What on earth do you mean?' I asked. 'It is exactly this,' he replied, ': 'My family all think me dead, and my wife wears widow's weeds.' I saw that he was not in jest, and then all at once I made up my mind that his reason was gone. 'If you have done this thing,' I exclaimed, 'you are certainly mad.' 'I am not mad,' answered Laurent, 'and yet I have done precisely as I told you. It was with the greatest difficulty that I refrained from going to them. But I had the courage to forego the happiness of pressing my wife and my children once more to my heart!' I was petrified with astonishment. 'But why?' I finally exclaimed, 'why?' 'It was necessary, friend Pécheira; and when you know all you will say the same. I rely on you to keep my secret.'

"It was the first time that Laurent Cornevin had fully opened his heart to me. I listened to him with increasing amazement. And even now, after all these years—so great was my attention—I can repeat Laurent's very words. 'One night,' he said 'I was the witness of a cowardly assassination, and the murdered man, before he breathed his last, had time to write a line, which was the proof of the crime. This proof I have done my best to utilize. My conscience commanded it. And this is why the assassins, having done their best to have me shot, carried me off to the Devil's Island, under a name that was not my own. They were powerful, and I was but a poor groom. No one would be disturbed by my disappearance or by my death. This new crime condemned a poor young woman and five children to death, or perhaps to infamy. But what did these wretches care for that, provided all proof of their crime was destroyed? When I left Australia I felt certain that my wife and children were dead, and I had but one idea, one desire—to avenge myself at any price. I still had the line written by the dying man in my possession; but I was situated so low, and the assassins so high, that I felt little hopes that this would avail me much.

"'I felt that it would be almost useless to cry out "I am Laurent Cornevin!" The police would prove that I was Boutin, who had escaped from the Devil's Island. And to tell the truth, I counted as much on my revolver as on this paper. But I determined on the greatest circumspection and prudence. I adopted every precaution and utilized every resource I possessed. No one could live as I have done, among political exiles, without having received much of their confidence—without being initiated into their secret associations—without knowing their meeting places, their chiefs, and their mysterious signs. In fact I had hardly reached Paris at ten in the evening when I met an old companion of mine at Guyana, who offered me hospitality at his house, and placed his funds and his abilities at my disposal. At daybreak I started forth in quest of my wife and children. It was a difficult task, friend Pécheira, to look for them in the midst of that great city of Paris. If I had only been able to act openly, I might have simplified the task. But, alas'

I was compelled to hide myself, for my enemies were more powerful than ever; and I knew very well that if they once knew of my existence, they would make short work of me. Fortunately, I was greatly changed. Time, privations, misery, and grief, had done their work. I had left Paris a young man; I came home an old one. My new garments also disguised me, and my beard was full and long. I went first to the house I had lived in at the time I was arrested. Not only did the people there know nothing of my wife, but they had never heard the name of Cornevin. Not one of the persons who had lived in the house at my time now remained there. At the very first step, therefore, the clew I held in my hand broke, and I was bewildered. I could not apply to my wife's family—first, because one of my sisters-in-law was the mistress of one of the murderers of General Delorge; nor could I go to the police, as it would have been tantamount to denouncing myself, and throwing myself into the jaws of the wolf.

"I was desperate. For a week I wandered through the poorest parts of the city with the mad hope that I might meet my wife face to face. Sometimes, amid the crowd, I saw a figure which reminded me of her; I said: "It is she!" and rushed off in pursuit. But I was always deceived. Sometimes I was utterly overwhelmed with despair, and I asked myself what was the good of looking on the earth for those who were asleep below it? I had never suffered so much, and with renewed bitterness I swore to be revenged on the people who had inflicted such cruel tortures on me. They were happy, rich, and honoured. They lived in palaces and rolled about in their carriages. I grew wild at the thought that they were, after all, beyond my reach. I could, to be sure, put a ball through the head of one of the wretches. But what was this chastisement compared to the crime? What was this sudden death compared to my years of agony? I had the letter, but where should I take it? I doubted everybody, and trembled to confide it to anyone.

"One Sunday I went into a café to breakfast, and while waiting to be served I carelessly turned over a huge volume which lay on the table near me. It proved to be a directory, and mechanically I looked for my own name, and sat as if stunned when I read: *MADAME JULIE CORNEVIN, Modes et Confections, Rue de la Chaussée-d'Antin.*

"Julie was my wife's name! How could I believe that the poor woman, whom I had left without resources, could have established herself in one of the most fashionable streets in Paris! However, I dashed out of the café, and jumping into a cab I was driven to the address indicated. The drive was a long one, fortunately, for I thus had time to collect myself, and it was with the greatest caution that I questioned the porter of the house. His answers left me without a doubt. It was, indeed, my wife who owned this establishment. I ran up the stairs and rang at the door, which was opened by a young maid, who told me that her mistress had gone out with the young ladies. Then, as I insisted on knowing when I could see Madame Cornevin on important business, she added: "You can go and ask for her in the Rue Blanche, at her friend's, Madame Delorge; she always spends her Sundays there." And, apparently frightened by my strange manner, she shut the door in my face.

"But I was not the same man. All my plans had been changed by these few words—"Madame Cornevin is with her friend Madame Delorge." To think that my wife, the wife of the groom Cornevin, was an intimate friend of the widow of General Delorge! Was it possible? I was perfectly well aware that Julie was my superior in intelligence, but she had no more educa-

tion than I had. How, then, could it have happened that a distinguished lady should receive her on terms of such intimacy? How on earth had my wife been able to get together money enough to establish herself in a part of Paris where the smallest apartments cost an absurdly high rental? These reflections and many others decided me to wait a little before I showed myself. Friend Pécbeira, I had been ungrateful enough to doubt God's goodness. To save my wife and my children a miracle was necessary. Was it not? Very well, the miracle had taken place. The day when I was dragged away from my family they found a better friend—the noble, generous widow of General Delorge, the very man whom I had seen assassinated under my very eyes.

“ ‘Indeed, Madame Delorge had received my wife—consoled her, encouraged her, and given her the means to live and set up in business. She had taken charge of my eldest son Léon, and had brought him up as if he had been her own child. She had induced a retired merchant, Ducoudray, to take charge of Jean. In short, if Fate had done her worst as regards my own misfortunes, my family now possessed advantages which I could never have given them. It was not in one day, friend Pecheria, that I learned all this. Having determined to give no signs of life, I proceeded with the very greatest circumspection, questioning the shop-keepers and the neighbours with extreme care. I suffered, certainly, in this strange situation, and yet I was not altogether unhappy. Everybody believed me dead. I was like a man risen from the tomb to satisfy himself about those whom he had left behind. I snatched every opportunity to see my wife and children afar off, to meet them in the street, and I felt more strangely than I can describe.

“ ‘How sweet were the tears that sprang to my eyes when seeing my wife still robed in her widow's mourning. I said to myself, “What would she say if she knew that this man whom she elbowed as she passed by is her husband, Laurent Cornevin?” But how changed they all were. Guided and instructed by Madame Delorge, my wife carried herself like a true lady. When I saw her so calm and dignified, so imposing in her silk and crape, I could hardly believe that she was the same poor, tired wife I had seen coming home so often from the public wash-house, with her sleeves rolled up to her elbows and carrying her wet linen over her shoulder. My daughters, each with a look of bright intelligence, and wearing fresh dresses and pretty hats, were like young ladies, born and bred. But my two sons astonished me even more. I never tired of following them about and of admiring them when they came from college, with their books under their arms, gay and well-dressed, and always accompanied by an old servant, as if they belonged to the family of some rich merchant.

“ ‘I made all sorts of inquiries, and was told that Jean was a demon, and that he was the torment of all the professors. Léon, on the contrary, was a determined student. Always the first in his class—always carrying off the prizes. Amid all these changes, I was the only one who was unaltered. I had fifteen thousand francs in my belt, but I was still the groom of other days—honest and proud of his honesty, but without education or breeding, common in manner and coarse of speech. I asked myself, when the first shock of seeing me was past, if my wife would not suffer on finding me like this, if my children would not be ashamed of their father's inferiority, and if I, in my own turn, would not be humiliated and irritated by their superior attainments. These reflections were very possibly unjust, but they were natural, and they moderated the ardent desire I felt to resume my place among my family.

“Other considerations also influenced me. Thanks to one of my political friends—the one who had given me shelter on my arrival in Paris—I had been informed of the events which had followed the death of General Delorge. I was told that his widow had moved heaven and earth to obtain justice and the punishment of his assassins. I knew that she had done all in her power to find me. I knew, too, that she acted under the advice of her lawyer and friend, M. Roberjot. An inquiry had been started, but it had been promptly suppressed, or rather, it had had been so superficially conducted that the murderers came out of it whiter than snow. But I learned also, and from a certain source, that Madame Delorge had not relinquished her intention and her hopes, but—always on the *qui vive* and armed for a contest—she was quietly awaiting the time when political events would enable her to move. All this was so perfectly well known to the imperial police, that this lady's house was watched as well as every step she took, and the people with whom she corresponded.

“I decided, after great perplexity, that as our enemies were in the height of success, this was no time to dream of using the weapon in my possession against them. The next thing to decide upon was, whether I should present myself to Madame Delorge and say nothing of the letter. Could I live on my wife's earnings? The idea filled me with horror. She never ought to be the master, the head of the house. And to prevent this I must be the main support of the family. How could I be that? What could I do with myself? Should I not be an incessant care and humiliation to my wife?

“Finally these reflections inspired me with an heroic determination—a determination that cost me agonies. I said that, as Madame Delorge could wait for the propitious hour, so could I, I swore that I would spend the intervening years in amassing a fortune and improving myself. And effectively I crushed every tender impulse that urged me to make myself known to my family, and I left Paris as I had gone there—secretly; and now I have come to you, friend Pêchira, for counsel and assistance. In six years I must be rich and worthy of my wife.”

VII.

M. DE BOURSONNE paused. The veil which had covered Laurent Cornevin's life and motives for so long was now torn aside.

“Now I understand!” muttered Raymond. And truly enough all that had been surprising in Cornevin's conduct was now explained.

The course he had selected might not have been the best, nor yet the wisest, nor that calculated to most surely lead to the revenge he dreamed of, but it was easy to see why he had selected it. It was easy to imagine how his distrust of himself had worked upon him, and how, above all, his pride as a husband and a father had induced him to conceal himself until his return would really prove a material blessing.

“Let us see the end,” said the old engineer. And he resumed the reading of the manuscript.

“From your own emotions, my dear friends,” continued Jean, “you can form some idea of my sensations on hearing this narrative. Poor dear father; I had always known his inflexible honesty, and I know that, humble as was his position, his heart was great. But suddenly he loomed before me in a new light, and with heroic proportions. I could not prevent myself from saying so to Pêchira, but he checked me.

"'Wait a moment,' he said, with a kind smile; 'wait till I have finished! I was bewildered with what your father told me. I was not surprised at his wishing to be rich; young or old, intelligent or stupid, a man always desires that. But that he should educate himself, metamorphose himself, become, in short, a perfect gentleman, to use his own expression, appeared to me a most formidable undertaking. It is not by a mere effort of will that a man of forty can change his skin. And, to tell the truth, your father had a hard task before him, for although he was the best of men, he was also rough, and absolutely without elementary education. I was enough his friend to express my opinion. 'Nevertheless,' he answered, coldly, 'I shall succeed.' There was no use in argument, and I determined to help him. The first thing he wished to do was to find a way of investing, or, rather, of utilizing the ten thousand francs which still remained to him, and it was of no use thinking of the existence we had formerly led, and which had given us our first gains.

"'Things move rapidly in a new country. Australia had already entered into a new phase of her history. Something like order had followed wild confusion, excitement, and extravagance. The days of delirious emotions and priceless nuggets, were over. The sands had given up their richest treasures, and gold must now be sought for in the depths of the earth. Civilization was at work at the mines. Companies were formed—associations which, having large capital at their disposal, with machinery and steam-power, sterilized individual efforts. So the search for gold had now become a trade, like any other—less lucrative, however; for while at Melbourne a carpenter earned his sixteen shillings, or his sovereign per day, a miner did not get more than ten shillings for eight hours' hard work.

"The game, which aroused hot fevers of anxiety with its sudden changes, was now played on 'Change, where men were enriched or impoverished in a brief hour, by buying and selling the stock of these companies, managing the mines. As the company struck good veins or otherwise, its shares fluctuated from a hundred to two hundred pounds in five minutes. It was in speculations of this kind that I had within one month quadrupled the capital which my division with Laurent had left me. Since then, terrified at my good fortune, and fearing to lose in one day what I had made in a month I contented myself with buying gold for export. I explained all this to Laurent. 'Ah!' he said, 'can it be possible that I came back in vain!'

"However, in addition to her mines, Australia possesses another source of wealth, a rich and inexhaustible one—her boundless prairies. The most intelligent emigrants had already abandoned gold seeking for stock-raising, foreseeing that in less than ten years their exports of wools and hides would become enormous. 'That's your business,' I said to Laurent, and he agreed with me.

"Adding to his own ten thousand francs twenty thousand more which I lent to him, he obtained from government the concession of a 'run,' that is to say, of an immense stretch of country on the shores of the Murray. Then he bought sheep and set to work—work which is very difficult and which requires iron health, invincible energy, boundless patience, and rare qualities of foresight and observation to yield a good result. Laurent had all these, and with them full knowledge of animals, which was due to his early career. His run prospered. His speculation, which was intended to furnish food to the miners, succeeded admirably; he paid me what he had borrowed, and in four years possessed half a million of francs to my certain knowledge. It was clear that he had carried out the first part of his programme, which was to make his fortune. To realize the second, to acquire

the instruction he needed, and become a gentleman, was the next. He went to work, and discovered a man belonging to a good family, and possessed of great culture and learning.

"Having found him, they became inseparable companions. This man, who was about forty years old, had left France on account of the misconduct of his wife. He was literally dying of hunger when Laurent found and offered him a home and fifty dollars per month. I was often tempted to laugh when I saw Laurent, always accompanied by his tutor, who said to him, 'You must not do this—you must not do that.' 'Take care—you uttered an oath then.' It was singular, and would have been ridiculous but for the intense gravity shown by your father, and his stubborn determination. Almost insensibly Laurent's manners softened. His ignorance was enlightened. His brain was awakened. He was able to reason and express himself. Laurent lived on his run, a hundred leagues up country, while my affairs kept me at Melbourne, so that I was struck by the increasing change whenever I saw him.

"At each of his visits I recognized a positive improvement. He always came with his tutor when the European mail arrived, and hurried to the post-office, and returned laden with papers, letters, and packages. I do not know whom he had intrusted while he was in Paris with the task of acting as eyes and ears for him; but to say the truth, he was admirably served. Everything was reported—every act of his wife and children, Roberjot and Madame Delorge, and from time to time photographs were sent of those he loved.

"Time passed, and, in addition to my former esteem for Laurent, I now felt a real admiration for the qualities which were developing in him. One morning he rushed into my office pale and out of breath. 'What is it?' I cried much startled. 'A terrible misfortune,' he replied. I thought of that curse of a stock-raiser, a pestilence among his cattle. I thought of an inundation. 'Are you ruined?' I asked. 'No—no—not that,' he answered, in a hoarse voice, as he threw a letter on the table. 'I have news from France,' he added, 'My son Jean has just been arrested!' I was amazed. 'Arrested!' I cried. 'And put in prison,' he rejoined. 'They have sent him to Brest, then to Guyana. 'They? Whom do you mean by they?' 'The wretches, who, after having murdered General Delorge, next disembarassed themselves of me, the witness of their crime.'

"Were I ever to see such hate in an enemy's eyes as I now read in Laurent's, I should know that my life was in danger. 'But,' he shouted, these ruffians will find their match, and they shall learn what it costs to attack my son.' I tried to calm him, but in vain. 'What do you mean to do?' I asked. 'To go at once. There's an English steamer in port now, the 'Duncan.' 'Yes, but she won't leave for a fortnight.' 'Yes, she will; she will be under weigh in six hours; she is coaling now.' I looked at him in utter stupefaction. 'Have you hired this steamer,' I asked. 'Yes, and had the captain refused it on hire, I should have bought it; and if that one had not been for sale, I would have found another.' 'But it will cost you an enormous sum,' said I. He shrugged his shoulders disdainfully. 'What of that!' he answered. 'I know too well what a man suffers on the Devil's Island to let Jean die there. Am I not rich?'

"He was indeed. Three or four times better off than myself. This I knew very well. At the beginning of this last year, he had told me that his net profits were two hundred thousand francs per annum. And your 'run,' I said, 'do you intend to give it up? Do you intend to sacrifice that

and the immense number of sheep you have?’ ‘What do I care,’ he cried, and then pointing to his friend and tutor, he added: ‘This gentleman understands my business; he will take care of it, and in return I will give him half the profits, which will amount this year to over two hundred and fifty thousand francs. Give me pen, ink, and paper, and we will draw up a contract.’

“His eager haste terrified me. ‘At least,’ I said, ‘tell me your plans?’ ‘I have none,’ was his reply. ‘I shall decide on my way.’ Nothing could detain him. However, just as he was leaving, he handed me a folded paper. ‘Everything must be provided for,’ he said. ‘If you do not hear from me for a year, open this envelope, and you will find my will inside together with certain instructions.’ A boat lay at the wharf. He entered it. I called out, ‘good luck to you,’ and ten minutes later the steamer was under weigh.’

Raymond clapped his hand to his forehead. “This, then, is the meaning of the mysterious influence by which Jean got away from the island,” he said.

“That is precisely what your brother says,” answered the baron. And displeased by the interruption, he added: “Pray let me go on.”

“And I,” continued Jean, “attributed the cordial welcome of the good merchant at Cayenne entirely to my own merits. It was to my father that I owed these powerful protectors, these amateurs, who bought my smallest sketches with such avidity. I ought to have felt my father’s hand in each friendly grasp which was extended to me. But why did he not reveal himself? How had he such astonishing courage, when I was so crushed with loneliness and despair as not to open his arms and cry out to me: ‘I am your father, and I have come to your aid?’ Answer me this, I said to Pécheira. But he would not answer; nothing could move him. ‘Your questions trouble me,’ he said, ‘let me tell my story in my own way. Laurent, as I was saying, went off and I remained in a state of great anxiety. It was five months before I had a line from him. He wrote that his enemies were so powerful that it would be the height of folly to attack them, as it would simply be the old story of the earthen and the iron pot. Not wishing to be broken, he determined to defer his vengeance yet a little longer only asking that God might allow his enemies to live until that time should come. He had assisted you, Jean,’ he said, but in such a way that you had no suspicion of the source of this aid. He added that, when I received this letter, he should already be far away from France, and that he should speedily follow his missive.

“Soon afterwards I received another note from Cayenne, containing only the words: ‘Expect me by the next steamer.’ And he arrived, and it was with the heartiest pleasure I grasped his hand. We had not been more than a quarter of an hour together when he realised the curiosity that tormented me. ‘Ask me no questions,’ he said, ‘for friend Pécheira, I dare not tell the truth, and I should be compelled to lie, which would be a disgrace to you and to me. I will tell you all I can——’ ‘which, my dear boy,’ so Pécheira continued, ‘was precious little indeed.’

“He said that on his arrival in Paris he was startled by some news he learnt from his political friends. They told him how a man who like himself possessed some compromising political secrets, had been carried off one evening and shut up in a lunatic asylum. ‘And,’ said Laurent, ‘the poor fellow ended by losing his reason, and all the while I was in France the fear of a similar disaster hung over me. Maybe my enemies believe me

to be dead, but I may be mistaken. It is possible they have never lost sight of me, but are only waiting for an occasion to punish me for my escape.' Laurent then went on to tell me what he had done for you, and how he had succeeded in placing you in a family at Cayenne, who would treat you as a son. All that he could do he had done, and he was comforted by finding that your health had not suffered from the climate.

"‘And now,’ he concluded, ‘the first part of my task is completed. I have educated myself and I have made a fortune. I have my weapons at last and can begin the contest. Let the villains tremble! God, who has so visibly protected me, will assist me once more. It is no common personal revenge which will satisfy me. The fellows must be brought to justice. They shall be made to shed tears of blood for their crime before they die. I am going to dispose of my property here and return to France. The hour is propitious. The Imperial Government is not what it was. The surface presents the same aspect—nothing is modified—but the foundations have been sorely shaken—one more shock and the edifice crumbles, and I intend to assist with all my strength in achieving this end. Not that I hate this *régime*. This or another is all the same to me. But this *régime* protects my enemies, and I shall assist in overthrowing it, so that they may be crushed under the ruins!’

"From that day forth Laurent had but one idea—to turn all his property into gold—which in a new country like ours is always a delicate operation, for very little capital is lying idle. And in Laurent's case the undertaking was especially complicated for he was involved in large freshly started enterprises, all excellent in themselves and apparently prosperous, but not likely to yield results for months. For this he could not wait. He wanted money, and he said to me, ‘I must have all I own in such a form that I can use it instantly.’

"Under such circumstances he was naturally bound to make great sacrifices, and he made them without hesitation. He had about eight thousand cattle on his run, and if time had been of no consequence, he could have obtained one million four hundred thousand francs for them. However, he sold them *en bloc* for nine hundred thousand francs. He sold his sheep, which were worth fifteen francs each, for eight, and the whole of them only brought in three hundred and fifty thousand francs. For his right to his run, for his buildings and fences, for a thousand cows and a hundred horses, he only obtained one hundred and sixty-five thousand francs, and that with a vast deal of trouble.

"I was sorry to see him throw away a fortune which had been accumulated with such labour—and sell in this style, what had cost him two millions for fourteen hundred and twenty-five thousand francs, for, with time, his run would have developed into one of the most important in all Australia. But he laughed at what he called my jeremiades. ‘Haven't I more than twenty times as much as my wildest fancy ever pictured?’ he asked. And thereupon he went on making new sacrifices. He sold all his stock in industrial enterprises—his interest in certain mines, which it is true, had momentarily fallen in value, but were certain to rise again, and naturally he disposed of these at a heavy loss, being anxious to finish with the matter, for he kept on repeating, ‘I feel that I am losing time.’

"He had been back in Australia for ten months or so when, one evening he came to me and said with a sigh of relief: ‘I have sold everything—I am free!’ And brandishing an enormous pocket-book—one which he could manage, however, to carry on his person—he added ‘There's all my for-

tune, in bills of exchange on Vienna, London, and Paris.' 'And you are going?' I asked. 'On Monday next—four days hence,' he replied.

"I knew that this separation must be eternal, and I also trembled for him. He divined my thoughts, for he took my hand, and with a voice full of resolution, such as might have imparted courage to an arrant coward, he exclaimed: 'Let your mind be easy, old friend; for more than a year I have been maturing all my plans, and I have applied every ray of intelligence I possess to avoid the perils of the step I am now taking. I have carefully weighed all contingencies, and I am prepared for everything.' 'Your enemies are very powerful,' I urged. 'I know it,' he said, 'but what have I to fear from them? You say that it is probable that they know of my existence and keep me in view. I think I should have found this out if it were the case. Still, as it is possible, I now intend to send them off the track. I shall not take the mail steamer, but leave in an American clipper bound for Liverpool, but which calls at several ports between here and there. At one of these ports I shall leave it, and take passage in another vessel. After that my identity will be lost. I leave Australia under the name of Boutin, but no Boutin will land in America, France, or England.' So saying he tapped his big pocket-book: 'These are my weapons,' he added gaily 'Nothing is impossible to a man with plenty of money!' And he was right.

"I never asked him the precise amount of his fortune—nor did he ever tell me; but I knew that everything together it could not have been far from five millions. Instances of fortunes made with such rapidity are rare even in Melbourne, but I can mention twenty or so: Barclay, Tidal, Colt, Latour, and Davison, became millionaires in a shorter time even than Laurent Cornevin. He was not spoiled by prosperity. He never forgot that it was through me he had left Talcahuana. He remembered, too, that it was I who had been the source of his wealth. Brave, good Laurent! How many times, when he saw my affairs less prosperous than his own, had he come to me and said: 'Zounds! man let us go into partnership.'

"It was on a small estate that I own, on the shores of the Murray, that we passed the last four days of his sojourn in Australia together. It was very sweet for us both to look back on the past, to the strong friendship which had never been shaken, and to swear that we would meet again. At last the hour came for him to leave. He promised to send me news of himself, and told me how to send him intelligence of my own welfare from time to time. And once more, on board the clipper, we grasped each other's hands, and neither of us was ashamed that tears stood in our eyes. This was on January 10th, 1869——"

"A year ago," murmured Raymond, "and I——"

"Let me go on," said the baron.

"You alone, dear friends," continued Jean, "you alone can imagine how greatly I was disturbed by Pécheira's narrative. And so I said to myself, 'Just as I hoped to ascertain that I was close on my father's track, I have lost him. We might have crossed each other on mid-ocean. Perhaps I saw him on the deck of a vessel that passed mine under full sail. Where was he now?' When I asked this question of Pécheira, he said he knew nothing, for certain, save that Laurent Cornevin had arrived safely in Europe. 'You had news of him, then?' I asked. 'Yes, once—five months after his departure, that is to say at the end of May—I received a letter from him, dated from Brussels. His voyage had been remarkably rapid, and his health was excellent. He had destroyed his track behind and his hopes

were high.' 'He said that?' 'Yes; I will show you the letter.' 'And since then?' 'Nothing—not one word. But were I in your place I should look for your father in Paris, not far from the Chausée d'Antin.'

"Now then, my friends, my task is over; yours is to begin. It is for you to finish my work—for you to decide what system of investigation shall be adopted in view of finding out my father. Only, my dear friends, be prudent. We know the infinite trouble my father has taken to attain his aims. Try to find him, but never forget that the least indiscretion on your part will arouse his enemies, reveal his existence, destroy all his hopes, and place his very life in peril.

"This is all the information I can give you: First, that according to my father's instructions, Pécheira addressed his letters to F. Thompson, Esq., Charing Cross, District Post Office, London, W. C. Secondly, Pécheira possessed a good photograph of our father, which I shall take to a photographer's and have copied to-day. I will send you one of the copies at once.

"Now, shall we communicate the result of my investigations to my mother and Madame Delorge? I think not. Why should we trouble their peaceful lives by loading them with our anxieties? Then, too, we can by no means feel certain that while we have been indulging in these illusions our enemies have not succeeded in suppressing my unfortunate father for the second time. Would it not be a most awful thing to open wounds, now partly healed? I have not another minute if this letter is to go to-day. So I only add the words—hope and courage.

"JEAN CORNEVIN."

"And this is all!" said the baron, in a disappointed tone. Then, after a moment's silence, and as if enlightened by an inspiration, he exclaimed: "Now we have it! This is the meaning of Maumussy's humble and conciliatory attitude!"

"Impossible!"

"And why impossible? Who can say that De Maumussy and Combelaïne have not penetrated the secret of your father's existence. May it not be that as long as they could watch him they felt at ease, but as soon as they lost all clue to him, they became frightened? The empire totters, their power escapes them, and it is precisely at this moment that they scent this mysterious danger."

The two friends then proceeded to read the letter from M. Roberjot which accompanied Jean's.

This was what the lawyer wrote: "You have a right to be hopeful, my dear Raymond, for it is clear to me that Cornevin is in Paris. But, in my opinion, to try and find him would be both foolish and unkind. We have no right to act contrary to his wishes. If this man, who loves his family so much, chooses to live apart from wife and children, it must be because he has powerful reasons for doing so. In my opinion, as in that of all sensible persons, dark days are close at hand. Wait! I say, wait!"

VIII.

WAIT! Had Raymond done anything else for years? No matter what projects he had formed, what hopes had crept into his heart, all were crushed by this advice. "It's killing me," he cried, "happy or miserable, other men fight and conquer, attack and defend themselves, triumph or perish in the effort while I——"

The baron interrupted him in a compassionate tone. "What would you do?" he asked

"What would I do. I don't know. Act at all events."

"You mean you would look for Cornevin?"

"Very possibly."

"That is to say, you would run the risk of compromising this worthy, noble man—this heroic fellow to whom your father confided his last wishes? That is to say, you would destroy the fruit of his ten years' patient toil."

"Why did Jean tell us to continue his task?"

"Because Jean is six thousand leagues from Paris, and does not know how near the finish may be."

Raymond rose, and began walking up and down the room in a state of great agitation. "The finish of it!" he exclaimed; "the finish! For years it has been promised me. I have been told that the hour was close at hand, and I have foolishly held my breath in momentary expectation."

The baron's face darkened. "Then," he said, "It is the mere desire for revenge upon your father's murderers which impels you to try and find Cornevin?"

"Of course."

"I fancied that Simone de Maillefert might count for something in your eagerness; I fancied that you were in haste to close the past so as to open the future, and that you hoped Cornevin would release you from the difficulties of your present position."

Raymond coloured. "I will follow your advice, sir," he replied. "What ought I to do? Speak, and I will obey!"

The old engineer smiled. "I shall make you very angry," he answered, "for I shall repeat just what you have so often heard. You must be patient."

"Yes, but Simone's peril is imminent."

"I know that, but you have so far done everything in your power. And by making a formal application for her hand you have silenced the vile slander which was in circulation."

"But her mother will devise some new combination."

"That is only too likely. But at the same time that is all the more reason why you should wait to see your adversary's cards. Ah! why were you not skilful enough to interest that beautiful young duchess in your game?"

Raymond had repelled this idea with horror when it had occurred to him. "Would it have been possible?" he asked.

"Possible! Nothing was easier—with a little skill and audacity. She held her hand out to you, my dear boy. To behave as I suggest would not have been very chivalrous, nor even quite loyal, but it would have been adroit. And after all her conduct has been most equivocal. But the opportunity is lost and cannot return." Then rising abruptly, the baron exclaimed "The government certainly does not pay us for smoothing your suit with Mademoiselle de Maillefert, and we must get to bed or we shall not be able to do anything to-morrow!" And refusing to listen to another word from Raymond, he added: "Good-night, good-night—sleep well."

This was capital advice to give, but long after the baron was sleeping soundly Raymond was still restlessly pacing his apartment, recapitulating in his mind the decisive events of the day. This day, the anniversary of his father's death, had begun by his interview with the Duchess de Maillefert and had ended by the letter from Jean Cornevin. What most disturbed him

was that he could not sufficiently detach his thoughts from Simone to reflect upon the fate of Laurent. "Heaven grant," he said in an undertone, "that to-day's step will have the result predicted by the baron."

On this point he was enlightened the next day in the public room of the Rising Sun. Master Bérn knew the whole matter; that was clear from the attention he bestowed on Raymond, and by the sympathetic tone of his voice. After a short time, he carelessly mentioned that ever since the duchess's arrival, the young lady had been raising money all over the province—that she was asking for advances from her tenants—that she had borrowed from the notaries at Angers—that she was stripping herself, and would end by being left without a sou. And then, with a knowing glance at Raymond, he added: "It is said that the Duchess does not wish her daughter to marry, and that she has said the most awful things about her to prevent any one from asking for her hand. A husband would defend the poor thing."

"What did I tell you?" muttered the baron in Raymond's ears, as he rubbed his hands gleefully.

But Master Bérn also knew other things of which the two engineers were quite ignorant. "She has borrowed everywhere," he said, "and now she is going to sell."

"Do you really think that?" interrupted M. de Boursonne.

The worthy innkeeper looked about him to be certain that no one could hear, and then, with a mysterious air, he said: "Some people know more than you think!"

"I dare say; but what do they know?"

"Well, sir, when you see crows flying about and massing together, what do you fancy? Why, that there is something for them to peck at—some carcass. This is the way folks are gathering about poor Mademoiselle Simone's property."

"What folks?" cried the two engineers at the same moment.

"First, one of those gentlemen who came to the château the other evening—the stout, rosy-faced man with the big gold chain, who looks at people in a lofty way, as if he were seated up among the clouds."

"M. Verdale!" muttered Raymond.

"But what has he done?" asked the baron.

"Nothing personally. But yesterday he came to Rosiers in a carriage. He went to the café, and there he met a certain man from Saint-Mathurin, who was once employed by Mademoiselle Simone on the estate. The pair then proceeded to a notary's—not to mademoiselle's notary, you understand—and then to the tax-collector's office, where they were joined by an old *huissier*."

The baron smiled lightly. "Is that all?" he asked, with feigned indifference.

"Ah! wait a minute. They all went over the De Maillefert property—very carefully, too, as if they were going to purchase. And then I heard the stout man say: 'It is worth a good deal of money, certainly, but not as much as you think.'"

This was all the innkeeper had to tell, but it was not without its importance, and as soon as he had withdrawn, the baron exclaimed: "Now we arrive at the real reason which has brought these gentlemen to the château. The duchess has discovered some way of getting hold of her daughter's fortune, and they have come here to commence operations. They feel so sure of success that they are already dividing the poor child's property."

"But she has sworn never to sell any of the land."

"Unquestionably; but these men are here to compel her to break this oath of her's."

There lay the danger, evidently; and Raymond and the baron were busily engaged in discussing it when a tilbury appeared in sight, driven by fascinating M. Bizet de Chenehutte in person. He jumped out and darted towards Raymond with extended hands, at the same time declaring that he had been looking for him everywhere. For he knew everything, he said, absolutely everything—both what Raymond had done and the answer he had received. Madame de Larchère had told him and everybody else about the duchess's abominable conduct in trying to disgrace her own child. "But she has only succeeded in disgracing herself," added Bizet. "The whole province has turned against her, and I honestly believe she would be hissed if she were to show herself at Saumur or Angers. Every door would be shut against her, and so she had better return to Paris with all possible speed. I must really go, gentlemen," he continued. "I have at least twenty visits to pay. I intend to spread this intelligence; but if I get through in season I shall come and ask you to give me some dinner." And then off he went.

"Nice young man," muttered the baron; "a most merciful Providence has ordained that fools have their uses in this world. And this one is doing us a service that no sensible man would dream of. If he comes to-night I shall take the greatest pleasure in offering him a good glass of wine."

But Bizet did not appear again. The old gardener from the château came, however, about nine o'clock to the Rising Sun with a letter for Raymond from Simone.

The young fellow poured all the silver in his pocket into the gardener's hand, and then tore open the letter which ran as follows:—"Things have gone better since you left than I ventured to hope. No one would imagine that anything had happened. My mother behaves to me exactly as she did before that horrible scene. I am certain, from some orders I heard her give her maid, that she will leave Maillefert to-morrow. SIMONE."

The next morning, when the two engineers were on the point of sitting down to breakfast, a great noise called them to the window just in time to see several carriages dash by. Master Bérû came in at the same moment. "Well! well!" he said. "Madame de Maillefert is off with all her friends. Good riddance to them!"

The baron triumphed. "What did I tell you!" he cried.

And in truth this departure was so like a complete rout, that it was difficult to attribute it to anything else but the step taken by Raymond, which was known, commented upon, and understood by all the people round about.

But Raymond did not dare to triumph. He had known too much disappointment and sorrow not to be very distrustful of good fortune. He felt that it would be the height of madness to conclude from the duchess's abrupt departure that she had renounced her designs on her daughter's fortune. It was clear that her needs were as pressing, her avarice as imperative as ever, and Simone's position was consequently quite as hazardous. Ah! if Madame de Maillefert's departure had only opened the château door to Raymond once more. But this could not be. By returning to Maillefert he would simply provoke a revival of the scandal, and rehabilitate the unworthy mother at her daughter's expense. And so having to comply with the proprieties which were even more than exacting than the duchess's will, he found himself separated from Simone. "I shall not even try to see her," he said, sadly.

And in justice to him, we must say that he did not; but a happy chance

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The baron triumphed. "What did I tell you!" he cried.

And in truth this departure was so like a complete rout, that it was difficult to attribute it to anything else but the step taken by Raymond, which was known, commented upon, and understood by all the people round about

But Raymond did not dare to triumph. He had known too much disappointment and sorrow not to be very distrustful of good fortune. He felt that it would be the height of madness to conclude from the duchess's abrupt departure that she had renounced her designs on her daughter's fortune. It was clear that her needs were as pressing, her avarice as imperative as ever, and Simone's position was consequently quite as hazardous. Ah! if Madame de Maillefert's departure had only opened the château door to Raymond once more. But this could not be. By returning to Maillefert he would simply provoke a revival of the scandal, and rehabilitate the unworthy mother at her daughter's expense. And so having to comply with the proprieties which were even more than exacting than the duchess's will, he found himself separated from Simone. "I shall not even try to see her," he said, sadly.

And in justice to him, we must say that he did not; but a happy chance

they both struggled to display a stoicism they were really far from feeling. However, the next morning the baron fairly broke down as he bade his young friend farewell. "You must come and pay me a visit," he said; "and above all don't commit any folly. If I can serve you, if you need me, you have only to write and say so."

The train puffed off, and Raymond stood gazing at the trailing smoke. A tap on his shoulder at last aroused him from his sad thoughts. It was Béro who was guilty of this familiarity—Master Béro, who had just said good-bye to the baron on the platform, and who now remarked to Raymond: "Let us go home."

"Home!" It was without the least afterthought that the innkeeper spoke this word. However, after celebrating the merits of the baron, and thanking God that one of his customers was still left, he exclaimed: "But is it true, sir, that you are no longer an engineer?"

Raymond turned round quickly.

"Why do you ask me that?"

"Because—because I heard some of the workmen say yesterday that you had sent in your resignation," replied Master Béro, much embarrassed—the fact is, he had listened to Raymond and the baron. "People are talking about it in the town. I declared, though, that it must be a joke."

It was hardly worth while for Raymond to make a mystery of what must soon be known, and so he quietly answered: "No, it was not a joke."

"Ah!" said Master Béro, with a knowing wink—"ah! I understand."

Master Béro gave Raymond the exact idea of what would be thought respecting his prolonged sojourn at Rosiers. A hundred other people would say "I understand," just as he had done. And there is no worse public to face than that of a little country town when its curiosity is aroused.

"Now I will consult Simone," thought Raymond to himself.

He had met her before on the highroad, and he repaired again to the same spot, which was not far from the old château. The weather had been glorious for a couple of days; the sky was clear and frosty; and the pale December sun shone on the denuded branches covered with hoar frost. With his face exposed to the north wind, Raymond stood under a spreading oak and waited. From this point of vantage he could contemplate one of the most beautiful landscapes along the Loire—a landscape of which the greater part belonged to Mademoiselle de Maillefert. Her's was all that spreading meadow-land—her's those forests and vineyards on the sunny hillsides. And he thought sadly enough that it was this immense fortune which raised such a barrier between himself and Simone. Ah! would that she were only poor like those peasant girls, who, with their faces purple with the cold, trudged past him as they returned from the market at Trèves, with their baskets on their hips and their wooden shoes striking the frozen earth like hammers! "Then," thought Raymond, "no one could dispute my love for her."

But time was passing, and he had become very uneasy, when all at once he perceived two women coming rapidly in his direction. He recognized Simone, in a large brown cloak, and Miss Dodge, the English governess, swathed in furs, with her hands buried in her muff. "At last," he muttered.

But almost immediately a terrible fear assailed him. Suppose Simone should be so astonished by his audacity as to reject the protection which he wished to afford her, this being his motive for remaining at Rosiers; and suppose she bade him go away? What could he do in that case?

Mademoiselle Simone and Miss Lydia were still quietly approaching the

spot where he was stationed, partially concealed by the drooping branches. All at once he stepped forward. "Good heavens!" cries the governess, who did not know this man for a moment, so suddenly did he appear. But Simone knew him, and went straight to meet him, exclaiming in a strange unusual tone—"You have allowed the Baron de Boursonne to go away alone? You have sent in your resignation?"

"Yes; I have done both these things."

Never did Simone and Raymond meet without an earnest protest from Miss Dodge, who declared these meetings to be most improper. However the young girl checked her governess on this occasion. "One moment if you please," she said. "That will do, thank you, Lydia." And addressing Raymond, she remarked: "I thought your position was all you had to rely upon."

"And you were right, I am sorry to say. My mother has some little means, but these are for herself and my sister."

Simone coloured, and looking at Raymond as if all at once a startling suspicion had assailed her, she asked: "But what do you mean to do?"

Raymond, too, turned crimson. He shuddered at the idea that Simone would imagine him capable of such shameless calculation. "Modest as my resources are," he answered, "they must suffice for the present, and before they are exhausted fate will perhaps look more kindly upon me. There is nothing to alarm me in the future."

The young girl's suspicions vanished as she looked into his eyes. "But I cannot accept such a sacrifice!" she said.

This phrase was Raymond's reward. "Why do you speak of sacrifices?" he exclaimed. "There was no time to consult with you—no time for hesitation. Our enemies wished to send me away; and so it was clearly my duty to remain."

While these words were being exchanged the poor governess had been shivering among her furs, and her nose stood out redder and redder on her long pale face. "Do let us walk on!" she said to Simone.

"Very well," answered the girl. And as they followed the road, she said to Raymond: "Do you intend to remain at Rosiers?"

He shook his head. "I have decided on nothing yet," he answered in an agitated voice. "I came to consult you. Dispose of me. Your will is mine. I will obey your orders without a murmur. My sojourn at Rosiers may be wrongly interpreted."

"It will be, certainly," sighed Miss Lydia.

Mademoiselle Simone stopped short. "Alas!" she said sadly. "Has not injury enough been already done to my reputation. A young girl's honour withers like a flower under the hot blast of calumny." Then, as if determined not to yield to her emotion, she suddenly exclaimed: "I must have time for reflection. To-morrow, Monsieur Raymond, at the same hour—here."

And taking the arm of her governess, she drew her into a little path which led through the wood towards the château.

The next day, some little time before the appointed hour, Raymond betook himself with a feverish step to the place of meeting, inventing a thousand plans and turning them over in his head—adopting and then rejecting them one after the other. The clock in the church tower struck two, and Simone appeared, accompanied by Miss Dodge, as on the previous afternoon. In three bounds Raymond stood beside her, as breathless with anxiety as if he expected a sentence of life or death.

As soon as Simone's eyes met his, she shook her head gently, and said, with a sad smile: "I am no nearer a decision than I was yesterday. I am not like myself. I feel weak, irresolute, and I cannot make up my mind."

"Then I am not to go away!" cried Raymond.

"Sometimes," answered the girl, in her clear, sweet voice, "I am almost frightened; I shiver without knowing why, and yet I cannot see any tangible ground for fears. My mother took a considerable sum away with her, and until that is exhausted I shall, no doubt, be at peace. My mother is not wicked, nor is Philippe. Their hearts are not bad; it is their heads that are weak."

Raymond was astonished at so much indulgence, not understanding that Simone urged these extenuating circumstances for herself as well as for him. "Alas!" he said, "it is not Madame de Maillefert nor your brother whom I fear; I distrust M. de Maumussy, De Combelaïne, and Verdale. Why did they come here?" He hesitated for a moment, coloured slightly, and then added, "I am afraid, too, of Madame de Maumussy. Half a dozen times words have trembled on her lips which I am convinced were the avowal of some abominable treason—some treason against you in which she plays her part."

Simone did not lose her beautiful serenity. "What can they do against me?" she asked. And then after a moment's hesitation she added, "If this be your idea, perhaps, you had better stay."

But Miss Lydia Dodge had also reflected, and she curtailed Raymond's expressions of gratitude. "Why not try some conciliatory method? A little prudent management never spoils anything. This gentleman might seem to go away, and yet remain. He could go, in fact, and then return and establish himself in some neighboring farm-house, and only go out in the evening."

Simone's beautiful face flushed. "Hide! and lie? No, never! It is not in that way one can release oneself from a false position. We will not transform a misfortune into a disgrace. If Raymond stays, he must stay openly, acknowledging with equal openness that he stays for me. My reputation would suffer perhaps, but in an infinitely less degree. Raymond has a right to shield me and my reputation, for if I am not his wife I shall never marry!"

Never was a person so thunderstruck as Miss Dodge by Simone's sudden vehemence. This fashion of facing the situation absolutely routed what she called her ideas. Her tall, bony frame—her thin lips and long, yellow teeth—her pale face, red nose, and round eyes did not make her a prepossessing being; but, despite her physical presentment, the worthy governess, to her own detriment, possessed a very sensitive nature and a most vivid and romantic imagination. She was the seventh daughter of a poor Protestant clergyman having an incumbency in the neighbourhood of London, and she had spent her youth in waiting, like the princesses in fairy tales, for the young and handsome hero who would realize her dreams. He never came, but poverty did. The clergyman died, his numerous family were scattered, and Miss Lydia was compelled to accept a situation as a governess. The trial had been a great one for her, and it was not without a fearful struggle that she buried all her illusions in the depths of her soul as in a tomb. Since then many years had passed by in silent resignation; but under her cold, rigid demeanour as a governess, there was still a warm heart beating. In the evening, when she was alone in her bedroom, she bolted her door and made up for all the annoyance of the day by plunging

eagerly into novel-reading. She devoured everything she could lay hands on, weeping hot tears over the persecuted and innocent heroines, and shivering with emotion as she read of the gallant deeds achieved by the heroes. She fancied that she had acquired from these nocturnal studies a thorough knowledge of the world, life, and passion, and above all she believed she had stored her mind with all sorts of valuable expedients, and was thus always ready to meet any emergency. It was thus, the most natural thing in the world for her to be deeply interested in Raymond and Simone's love. She said all sorts of reasonable things to them, for she considered that a part of her duty as a governess; but, in the depths of her heart, she was their devoted accomplice, thinking at the same time, that they were foolish children, and that if she had been in their place she would soon have found a way out of the dilemma in which they were involved.

However Raymond agreed with Simone. "No, no," he replied; "we have nothing to conceal. Dissimulation would dishonour our love."

"And besides," added Simone, "this will only last a little while. I shall find some way of winning my mother over, and bringing my duty and my wishes into harmony."

The day was drawing to a close and reminded of this by Miss Lydia, the young people reluctantly separated, but not without promising to see each other again at the same time and place.

The next week they were several times seen and met by people on the high road. "It was certainly very odd!" according to M. Bizet de Chenehutte; and many people declared it was somewhat too bold; while others of Madame de Maillefert's circle smiled, and said: "This young Delorge is really too good. Were I in his place I should make short work of the matter, and run off with the young lady."

All these cheerful remarks were at once reported to Raymond by M. Bizet, who having constituted himself his agent and advocate, ran about the country gathering up all he could for or against him, and forming public opinion, as he loftily remarked.

Simone and Raymond cared but little for all this gossip. Overjoyed by the peace so unexpectedly granted them by this respite of even a few weeks' duration, they hastened to take advantage of it, forgetting in the joy of the present both the storms of the past and the clouds of the future. And by degrees, at the end of the week, they quite forgot themselves, and spent nearly all their time together, although always accompanied by Miss Lydia. One day Raymond offered Simone his arm as they walked along the road overlooking the Loire, followed by the governess. The next day the weather was atrocious; it was impossible for Simone to walk about, and so Raymond sent to ask if she would not come to the ruins of the old château. "Why not receive Monsieur Delorge here, in the new château?" objected Miss Lydia.

This would have been far wiser, only Raymond and Simone did not think so. As long as the rain lasted, they spent their afternoons among the ruins, where there was a large arched hall, in which all sorts of *débris* had been accumulated. It was here that the lovers met. Once when Simone's feet were wet, Raymond went off and collected an armful of dry wood, with which he lighted a fire in the big chimney. "How delightful!" cried the girl. "I wish we always had one!" and these simple words were as an order to Raymond, so that when Simone arrived at the ruins the next day there was a bright fire already crackling and roaring up the chimney.

Raymond never received any letters from Paris, and he never opened a newspaper. He heard that affairs were going badly—that the empire was

hesitating between a liberal ministry and a new *coup d'état*. But what did this matter to him? All he thought of was of persuading Simone to purchase her mother's sanction to the marriage, by abandoning part of her fortune. She had rejected the plan when he first unfolded it; but, by degrees, she listened more patiently, her firm will shaken by the calm and gentle life they now led.

One day in December they were sitting close by the fire talking, and Miss Lydia was reading a little apart, when all at once they heard some stones rolling, and quick steps approaching through the ruins. "Who is that?" cried Raymond, starting up. But before he had time to go and ascertain, M. Bizet de Chenehutte appeared before him. "May I ask—" began Raymond, haughtily, thinking that Bizet's curiosity had brought him there. But the young provincial gave him no time to proceed, "Monsieur Philippe! the Duke!" he cried. "Take care. He arrived an hour ago, and he is close at my heels now."

Simone rose to her feet. "My brother!" she gasped.

"Yes, your brother," answered a mocking voice. And M. Philippe stepped upon the scene, looking just as usual. He put his glass to his eye, and took in each detail of the strange scene—Miss Lydia crouching on a broken column, with her book open on her knees, Simone leaning against the chimney, Bizet, red and out of breath, and finally, Raymond, who stood with head erect and defiant eyes. "A most singular place really to meet a lover," drawled the duke, "particularly when one possesses the most beautiful château in all Anjou!" Then, turning to Simone, he added; "I am by no means without pity for the faults of others, dear sister. We all have our weaknesses——"

"Not another word!" interrupted Raymond, fiercely.

The duke mechanically started back. "Ah! a duel," he said.

But Raymond snatched up a heavy branch of oak and went towards him "No—not a duel!" he answered, in a hoarse voice. "But if any man that breathes is wanting in respect to this lady, I will kill him like a dog."

Philippe believed him. "You are mistaken, my dear Delorge. My sister is quite old enough to know what she is about; and I myself need far too much indulgence to have any right to be severe towards her. If I have disturbed you, it is simply because I came down from Paris to see Simone respecting a matter which involves the honour of our house. On inquiring for her, I was told that I should find her here."

It was clear that something fresh was a-foot. His conciliatory words and deferential manner proved this conclusively. "Will you go with me to the château, Simone?" he asked.

His sister slowly moved to his side.

"Mademoiselle!" implored Raymond, following her.

"Excuse me," said the duke; "you are not as yet one of the family, and we have some dirty linen to wash." And he drew Simone along, followed by Miss Lydia, who trembled at each step.

"Well! well!" exclaimed Bizet, and then he continued: "It is perfectly evident, my dear Delorge, that the duke has had some spies down here. He came straight to this spot, and never spoke to a human being on his way."

But Raymond paid no attention to what his companion said. "What on earth does the young duke want?" he muttered. "What sinister intrigue is on foot now?"

Bizet, who was by no means a bad-hearted fellow, had the greatest difficulty in getting him back to Rosiers and into his own room. And not being

the person to abandon a friend in trouble, the young squire took a seat near the window at the Rising Sun. Suddenly he uttered an exclamation. He had just seen Philippe driving rapidly towards the station. He had come by the noon express and left by the four o'clock train.

"I must know what has happened!" cried Raymond. And springing up, he dashed down the stairs and hurried off to Maillefert.

He found the doors wide open. He entered and called, and heard no answer. With a terrible fear at his heart, he hastened up the staircase. In the small blue drawing-room which was lighted by one solitary candle, Simone was lying on a sofa—looking so pale, so frightfully changed, that he thought her dead at first. But she was alive, and she opened her eyes when he spoke to her, but would only say, "For pity's sake, leave me. To-morrow! to-morrow!"

He hesitated at first and then, as she repeated her request, he went away with death in his heart. He had never before endured such intolerable anguish. By noon on the following day he had heard nothing, and he was on the point of starting for the château, when Bérú entered the room with a letter.

With a sick feeling of apprehension, Raymond broke the seal and read as follows: "When you receive these lines I shall have left Maillefert for ever. Honour itself is lost. If you love me, I implore you, in the name of that love, not to try to find me. I am the most miserable of women. Farewell, my only friend, farewell."

Raymond tottered and caught at the wall. "While we slept, the others watched!" he muttered. "Blind fools that we have been!" Then all at once he exclaimed, "This is Maumussy's and Combeldaine's plot. They have stolen Simone from me. Ah! the wretches! God punishes me for having forgotten my duty to my father."

That evening he was on his way to Paris.

Part V.

THE RACE FOR MILLIONS.

I.

It was on Wednesday, December 29th, 1869, that Raymond Delorge reached the capital. What he meant to do—what his hopes were—he would have found it difficult to say. Mademoiselle Simone de Maillefert had been taken to Paris, and he had followed, ready for anything. But the journey—one of some ten hours' duration—had considerably cooled him down, and he had regained much of his usual *sang-froid*.

The clock was striking nine when he rang at his mother's door. "It is Master Raymond," cried old Krauss, as he opened it. For the faithful trooper was still in the service of Madame Delorge, and years seemed to have left the strength and vigour of his wiry form undiminished.

"My brother!" cried a sweet youthful voice, and Pauline flew down the stairs. She was a great beauty, tall and fair, with chestnut hair, bright intelligent eyes and smiling lips. After giving her brother a dozen energetic hugs and as many kisses, she exclaimed: "You came just in time, for Ducoudray has sent us some delicious oysters from Marennes."

But she was interrupted by Madame Delorge who, recognizing her son's voice, now hurried down stairs in her turn. "How glad I am to see you, my dear son," she said, in a trembling voice; and, after kissing him, she drew him into the drawing-room, so as to look at him in a better light.

The room was just as Raymond had left it. His father's portrait faced him as he entered, and the sealed sword worn by the general on the day of his death still hung across the canvas. "So you decided, then, to come and pass the holidays with your mother and sister?" said the widow, while Pauline clapped her hands joyously.

But Raymond slowly answered, "I have come for longer than that, I fancy—for I have resigned."

"Resigned your position!" cried his mother. "And why?"

Raymond hesitated. The words he uttered now would have, as he well knew, a most decisive effect on his future. Why should he not tell his mother the entire truth? Was he not certain of her sympathy? However courage failed him. He knew the pain he would cause her, and he was quite as much afraid of tears as reproaches. "I was not willing to submit to an arbitrary measure of the authorities," he said, "a measure which was exceptionally unjust."

His mother's eyes flashed. "I knew it would come to this," she said; "I always expected it. I have been astonished that you were allowed to follow your career in peace without being interfered with, like poor Jean and Léon."

Raymond rejoiced at the interpretation his mother put on his words, for no further explanation on his part was necessary. It was clear that his supposed wrongs only fanned the flame of his mother's hatred. "They don't intend to let us forget them," she said bitterly. And extending her hand toward her husband's portrait, she added: "Do they indeed think it possible for us to forget?"

Raymond undoubtedly hated his father's cowardly murderers with a mortal hatred, and, at the same time, he abhorred Messrs. de Maumussy and de Combelaïne for being, as he judged, the accomplices of the Duchess de Maillefert. "No, I have not forgotten them, mother," he replied, "and the wretches shall make amends sooner or later for all that they have made me endure!"

Never had Madame Delorge heard her son speak in such tones of concentrated rage. She snatched his hands in hers and held them in a firm grasp. "You have spoken well, my dear boy! At times I have thought you pre-occupied, and indifferent to our interests, possibly. I doubted, I must confess, not your courage, but your perseverance; and I trembled lest I should see you turn from the path leading to what should be the sole aim of our existence. I was mistaken, and I beg your pardon."

Raymond turned away, ashamed to have deceived his mother, and to be obliged to listen to her praise which he knew he was unworthy of.

"You are free," continued Madame Delorge—"so much the better. You will see M. Roberjot to-day, and you will learn from him, better than from me, that the hour we have been waiting for is near at hand."

She stopped speaking, for at this moment the door of the drawing-room opened and in walked M. Ducoudray who had come to eat the oysters which he had sent the previous evening. The worthy man was not far from eighty, and yet no one would have suspected it, so straight was his figure and alert his step. Mentally and morally he was precisely the same as when we met him in 1852—a thorough Parisian *bourgeois*—a carper and jester. Skeptical and credulous at one and the same time; adventurous, yet timid—always ready to help on a revolution, and equally ready to hide in a cellar, when once the revolution came. "Upon my life!" he exclaimed, "here is our engineer!" and, after shaking hands with Raymond vigorously, so as to show that his manly strength was unimpaired, he began to tell all he had been doing since he rose that morning at seven o'clock.

Krauss came to say that breakfast was on the table; but nothing stopped the old gentleman when he was once fairly started. He continued to talk and mentioned that on his way to the Rue de Douai, he had dropped in at Madame Cornevin's where he had admired a truly royal *trousseau* she had prepared for the daughter of one of those great Russian noblemen, whose fabulous wealth reminds one of the "Arabian Nights." According to the old gentleman's story, Madame Cornevin would make a very large profit on this one *trousseau* alone, and he went on to say that she had accumulated a handsome fortune, of which he could speak with authority, as he managed all her investments.

However although she was now rich, she was still prudent and economical, and rarely partook of any recreation, save a Sunday walk, after which she usually dined with Madame Delorge. Madame Cornevin had never ceased to lament her husband: she talked of him incessantly. In vain did Ducoudray tell her that Laurent must have been dead for years—she had never entirely abandoned the hope of seeing him again. As Raymond listened he saw that the secret of Jean's letters had been well guarded, and that no one suspected that Cornevin was, at that very moment, in Paris.

After this mention of Madame Cornevin's affairs, garrulous M. Ducoudray proceeded to pass all the interesting Parisian news in review. First, the Princess d'Eljensen was about to give a superb *fête* at her grand mansion in the Champs Elysées and the newspapers were already full of particulars. Then the Duke de Maumussy was selling several of his race-horses, not

because he was ruined, but because he had too many; and a passion for pictures, curiosities, and china, had followed his taste for the turf. Next, for the twentieth time, no doubt, there was a report of M. de Combelaine's marriage to Madame Flora Misri; but this time it was true, at least, so Ducoudray said. After all these *can-cans* came particulars respecting Tropmann, the assassin—the wild beast with a human face—whose trial had just begun.

Each word spoken by Ducoudray ought to have been full of meaning for Raymond, who had just spent a couple of months without once looking at the newspapers. What the worthy old gentleman said was to be sure the mere echo of the Boulevard; but it showed what people thought of all the men whom he was burning to attack. However the truth was, his thoughts were elsewhere—he hardly heard what was said. He was seated between his mother and sister, and it was a miracle that neither of them noticed that he ate nothing, and could barely play with his knife and fork. All that Madame Delorge remarked was that he was very pale. "Are you ill, Raymond?" she asked. But he protested that he had never been better in his life; and, when breakfast was over, he left the room, saying he would dress and then go and see M. Roberjot. However Pauline had been more observant than her brother supposed, and hardly had he entered his room than she was by his side, and, with her arm round his neck, softly asked him: "What is the matter, dear brother?"

He started. "What should be the matter?" he replied, with a forced smile. "I am only a little tired."

She shook her head. "I know better," she answered, petulantly. "That is what you said to mamma, and she believed you, but I watched you all through breakfast. Your body was with you, but your mind was far away."

Raymond kissed his sister. "Dear little spy!" he said, with an attempt at gaiety.

"But that is no answer," she sighed.

"What do you wish me to say?"

"I wish to know why you are so harassed,—why, you look ten years older than you did when you went away!"

"I suppose it is because I am anxious about my future, having sent in my resignation."

"I wish I could believe you," she answered. "In your eyes I am still a little girl, no doubt. But when you have been at home a little while you will see that I can keep a secret." And so saying she went out.

"Poor little Pauline!" thought Raymond, "Simone and she would love each other like two sisters." But could he trust her? He had not even decided to confide everything that had happened to M. Roberjot—nor was he any nearer a decision when he went up the lawyer's staircase.

Roberjot had become quite a personage—a deputy and influential orator—but he had kept his simple home, and his one servant, who recognized Raymond as soon as he saw him, and at once opened the door of his master's room. Nothing was changed there. The same pictures hung on the walls, the same paper-weight secured what looked like the same notes and papers, on the same desk. Time had blackened the wood of the furniture, faded the curtains and wall-paper, but that was the only difference. However the lawyer himself was more changed than his surroundings. His hair, once so black, was now thickly sprinkled with gray, and ambition and politics had furrowed his brows with deep wrinkles. He was also much heavier; his

former *embonpoint* had resolved itself into obesity; his features had lost their delicacy of outline and his mouth had almost a sensual expression. Nothing was the same with him except his eyes, as keen and bright as ever, his sarcastic voice and graceful gestures.

"At last!" he exclaimed, as Raymond appeared. "I knew very well that you would think that it was worth your while to come here as soon as you knew how things were going."

"What things?"

The lawyer looked at him. "May I ask you where you come from?"

"From Rosiers, in Maine-et-Loire."

"Well! you can get the newspapers there, I presume?"

"I have not opened one for two months!"

The lawyer raised his arms to heaven as if he heard a blasphemy. "Car that be so?" he exclaimed; "then listen to me." And he proceeded to recapitulate certain events of a public character which had just taken place, and were of the greatest possible weight.

The very evening before a paragraph, which ran as follows, had appeared in the *Journal Officiel*: "The ministers have sent in their resignations, which have been accepted by the Emperor. They will remain, however, in charge of their respective departments until their successors are appointed." Then followed a letter from the Emperor himself, applying "with confidence to the patriotism" of M. Emile Ollivier, and intrusting him with the formation of a new cabinet.

M. Roberjot was radaint, and laughed aloud with delight. "So you see," he said, "the task of saving this threatened dynasty is imposed on Ollivier. Does he think he will succeed? Of course he does. But he will need more shoulders than his own to uphold an edifice which is cracking and crumbling on all sides. He will promise to move mountains—and we will give him two or three, even six months to make vain efforts, but what then? Remember what I say to you this 29th day of December, 1869. The Ollivier cabinet will be the last cabinet of the Second Empire."

Raymond listened to these words with an emotion which can be easily understood, for was not his own fate involved in political events? "And then?" he asked.

Roberjot snapped his fingers. "Then will come the hour of justice for those who have waited eighteen years. A simpleton like Barban d'Avranchel won't question De Combelaïne and De Maunussy then—no, the garden of the Elysée will be made to give up its secret."

"But it is Laurent Cornevin alone who knows that secret," said Raymond.

"And he will tell it!"

"Do you really believe him to be in Paris?"

The lawyer looked amazed. "But did you not read Jean's letter?" he cried.

"Of course I did."

"Was it not perfectly clear?"

Struck by Roberjot's certainty, Raymond at once agreed to the probability of Cornevin's presence in the capital, and this fact once admitted, he began to realize the precious assistance this man might afford him, thanks to his indomitable courage and energy. "Had we not better look for him?" he ventured to say. "We might use the greatest caution."

"Are you utterly mad?" cried the lawyer. "Would you put the police on his track? Would you denounce him and have him arrested? How do you know that he may not be at the head of one of the hundred revolutionary

movements which are now being projected? No, be careful not to interfere with him. Let him manage the matter as he chooses; he is certainly entitled to do that. You may be certain that he will appear when he is needed. What has been a question of years is now but a question of months, or even weeks perhaps."

How could Raymond listen without a pang to people who talked to him of months, weeks, and even days, when the very minutes which were slipping by so rapidly bore Simone's fate, happiness, and life, away on their wings!

He said no more, but his face became so gloomy that M. Roberjot was struck by it, and asked, in a tone of friendly anxiety: "What has gone wrong with you? I am your friend, as you well know. What is it?"

"I no longer belong to the government corps of engineers," said Raymond. "I have sent in my resignation."

Pauline, with her quick girlish instinct, had had a glimpse of the truth, but Roberjot took the same view of the matter as Madame Delorge had done. "They were troubling you, then?"

"They chose to change my quarters——"

The lawyer began laughing. "I suppose," he said, "that the son of some great personage wanted your place—that's a very simple explanation. But console yourself. There is a great card for you to play. When the empire falls you will have the most undisputed rights to advancement. And besides you find yourself at leisure at the right time, for we need men——"

He was interrupted by his servant, who appearing at the door, announced that he had just shown a visitor into the waiting-room. "And who is it?" asked the lawyer.

"Monsieur Verdale."

Roberjot's face changed. "What?" he exclaimed, raising his voice as if he wished to be heard in the next room, "is my dear friend Baron Verdale there?"

"No, sir, not the baron; a young man."

"His son, possibly?"

"I don't know, sir."

Accustomed as Roberjot was to restraining all outward signs of emotion, he nevertheless, on this occasion clearly evinced his curiosity. "Well," he said to his servant, without seeming to remember Raymond's presence, "show the gentleman in."

A moment later the door communicating with the waiting-room opened, and a young man who looked about Raymond's age appeared.

"You are the son of Baron Verdale, sir?" asked Roberjot, abruptly.

If the visitor had answered no, he would have been believed, for there was nothing in his appearance at all suggestive of the architect. He was tall and slender of build and elegantly but very simply dressed. However, before he could reply, Roberjot continued, "And you come from the baron?"

The young man smiled faintly. "You know very well, sir, that my father has not the smallest right to the title of baron which is engraved on his visiting-card. It is a weakness of his, which, however, it is unbecoming for me to criticise——" He did not say so in words, but the gesture he now made clearly signified: "Spare me the worry of the title."

Then after a pause he added, "The fact is, sir, I come to you on my own account, not on my father's." He hesitated, for he had just seen Raymond, who had withdrawn on one side. "But you are not alone, sir. I fear I am intruding, as what I have to say will take some time."

Although Raymond was very pre-occupied he saw that his presence was

embarrassing to the young visitor. So he hastily exclaimed, "I am going," and then addressing the lawyer, added: "Now that I am once more in Paris I shall trouble you very often; but for this morning I bid you good-bye!"

II.

HARDLY a day elapses in this great city of Paris, where so many human interests centre, and so many human passions ferment, without one meeting some unhappy-looking person who paces the sidewalk in a somnambulist fashion, talking to himself. Much in this style did Raymond walk along on leaving the lawyer's office. Instinct rather than volition led him to the neighbourhood of the mansion occupied by the Duchess de Maillefert. "But for what?" cried his good sense. "Who knows?" replied the voice of Hope, which had not yet been stifled in his breast. "Perhaps just as you pass a curtain may be raised, and you may catch a glimpse of Mademoiselle Simone."

The Maillefert mansion stands at the corner of the Rue de Grenelle-St. Germain and the Rue de La Chaise. It is approached by a court-yard as cold and dreary as that of a prison. On either side are the domestic offices and servants' quarters. The porter's lodge is in front, and its exaggerated dimensions show that it dates from those good old days when even noblemen of the highest rank allowed their *suisse* to keep a wine shop, and even hang out a sign. The great charm of the Maillefert mansion is its garden, adjoining that of the Duc de Sairmeuse, stretching as far as the Rue de Varennes, and with its ancient trees o'ertopping the roofs of the adjoining houses. The great gate was wide open as Raymond passed by, and certainly no one would have imagined, on looking in, that the Duchess de Maillefert was ruined, and so besieged by creditors that she had to resort to the worst expedients to keep up an appearance of luxury. Three or four carriages, drawn by magnificent horses, stood waiting in the yard, while the coachmen and footmen lounged hard by and gossiped about their masters.

"What can Roberjot mean?" said Raymond to himself. "How can he say that the empire is tottering when all this luxury is still kept up?"

At this moment a brougham whisked round the corner, and Raymond only had just time to draw aside for it to enter the court-yard; a moment later he saw the Duchess de Maumussy slowly ascend the steps.

"And she will see Simone!" he thought.

He clenched his hands at the idea that the doors of this house were closed to him alone—this house which so many persons entered with smiles on their lips—and that Simone was somewhere under that roof at this moment. What was she doing? Who was torturing her now? What did they want of her, and what means would they employ to bend her to their ends? "And to think that I know nothing of the intrigue that tore her from me?" he groaned. "Why did she not allow me to die with her if I could not save her?"

He was vainly tasking his brain in an effort to think of some question he might ask to find one of the servants, when suddenly he heard a voice behind him: "Monsieur Raymond Delorge, I think?"

He hastily turned and found himself face to face with the young duke, who, with a cigar in his mouth, a glass in his eye, and a light riding-whip in his hand, was looking at him from head to foot in the most impertinent

manner. The blood rushed to Raymond's face. No man should look at him in that way, and he started forward. Suddenly, however, he checked himself. "You wish to speak to me?" he asked.

"Certainly I do," answered M. Philippe, "and I am delighted to see you—on my honour I am. You are an admirer of my sister's, I believe?"

"With the encouragement of the duchess, sir, as well as your own."

"I don't dispute that. I now simply desire to say that you must relinquish all hope."

"Do you say this from Mademoiselle Simone, sir?"

"By no means. I say it from my mother and myself; but Simone ought to have written it to you." Raymond did not reply. "I believe, in fact," resumed the duke, "that my sister did write it. That being the case, it would surely be better taste on your part to give up the idea. You agree with me, I'm sure. At Maillefert it did not so much matter; but now, having formed plans for her marriage——"

"Plans for her marriage!"

"Yes, sir, with your permission," and the duke bowed with ironical politeness. "And so," he continued, "you will do me the favour not to let me find you prowling round my house again;" and thereupon Philippe turned his back and went into the house.

Raymond was boiling over with indignation, but as he looked after Philippe he muttered to himself: "Poor fool! No, it is not at you, that I ought to strike."

It was true this last scion of the De Maillefert race was one of those persons whose utter nullity offers no salient point for hatred. Vain with the puerile vanity of imbeciles, devoured by a mad desire for show, worried by the thousand-and-one pitiful contrivances which he was forced to resort to in his wish to keep up the appearance of possessing a princely fortune, Philippe was the accomplice and the dupe of the first man who held the glittering bait of gold before his eyes. It was perfectly certain that what he had just done was in obedience to the mandates of others. Here, as at the ruins of Maillefert, he was clearly the submissive slave of some stronger will—the mere tool of an intrigue, the profits of which would not be pocketed by him.

Nevertheless, one piece of information had been gained by Raymond, namely—that they intended to marry Simone. Was this the answer to the enigma; the explanation of all the strange events which so rapidly followed one another? Was this the explanation of Simone's own mysterious conduct? But, of course, no such projects could be carried out without her consent. She was not one of those girls who could be dragged to the altar, and from whom mingled caresses and threats could elicit the irrevocable "Yes." She had proved her strength of character. So would she consent, after all her promises and oaths? Was it possible, even probable?

On the other side—perhaps the Duchess de Maillefert, aided by the Duchess de Maumussy and advised by Combeldaine—had succeeded in devising some combination by which her daughter should be compelled to make this terrible sacrifice? A sentence which had dropped from Philippe's lips, as he drew his sister that day from the ruins, was full of import. "We have dirty linen to wash in the family," he had said. Now, was it not a natural inference that he had some painful and shameful confession, to make, which would require a supreme act of devotion on his sister's part? This supposition was so plausible, that Raymond's heart thrilled with hope. And yet, there was one great objection to this idea—for how could the duchess and her son, dependent as they were on Simone's income, think of

her marriage, and much less arrange it? Why had they changed their plans and their opinions so entirely? What abject calculation, what new infamy was concealed under this abrupt change of tactics? "It matters not," said Raymond to himself, "I will save Simone in spite of herself! But see her and speak to her I will."

It was now late, and the shops were closed. While thinking, he walked up and down the street opposite the Maillefert mansion, and at last espied a placard announcing "Unfurnished Rooms to let," at one of the houses on the opposite side of the way. A new idea suddenly struck him, and he rang the bell. "You want to look at the rooms to-night, at this hour?" said the *concierge*, whom he politely addressed. "No, indeed. You can come to-morrow."

But Raymond carried in his pocket certain arguments before which the man's sulkiness vanished like mist before the sun. He became all smiles, and, lighting a candle, he led the young man to a small room on the third floor, which he declared was worth a thousand francs a year. It was a most preposterous price, for the room was dirty, and so damp that the paper was peeling from the walls. However, this was of no consequence to Raymond, for on looking out of the window, he discovered that from this third floor he could see every one who entered or left the De Maillefert mansion.

"The apartment suits me," he said, "and I will take it; and drawing a twenty-franc piece from his pocket he handed it to the *concierge*, who then began to ask a multitude of questions. "Who was the gentleman? What was his name? Was he married? Had he any children? What were his references?"

These questions came so rapidly that Raymond had no time to shape his answers. He knew very well that the name of Delorge must never be mentioned in that neighbourhood; so he promptly assumed his mother's name and called himself Paul de Lespéran. He said he was employed in a lawyer's office, and unmarried; that he had always lived with his parents, and had no furniture, but would buy some. He offered to pay a quarter in advance, and this being arranged he went to a furniture dealer in the Rue Jacob, who sold him a certain amount of furniture for about double its value and engaged to install it in the room before midnight.

"I wonder if he has kept his word!" said Raymond, the next morning, as he left his mother's house. It was eight o'clock on the 30th of December, the weather was very cold, and the pavement slippery. But at all the corners groups of people were standing and talking with considerable animation.

Raymond stopped near one of them and found that the chattering was talking of Tropmann, whose trial was then going on, and the political situation also. Forty-eight hours had elapsed since the emperor had commissioned Emile Ollivier to form a ministry in "the interests of Order and Liberty," and the Parisians were anxious to know what had been done, or what was to be done.

The most absurd rumours, such as are only heard in Paris, were in circulation. According to some, Emile Ollivier had been checkmated, and his overtures repulsed—and he was about to abandon his mission. According to others, he had insisted on the emperor's acceptance of a cabinet formed of his old friends of the popular party, while others again affirmed that M. Rouher would come back with flying colours. It was clear that there was a great deal of dissatisfaction. Since the last election, the uncertainty of the future had paralyzed business—postponed projected industrial enterprises, and intimidated capitalists, who are by nature cowards, and always ready

to hide at the least alarm. However, the uncertain state of affairs did not seem to affect the retail business of the week. The New Year, with its gifts was close at hand, and Paris outwardly seemed very gay. Early as it was, the shop windows were already decked with articles suitable for presents, from things of great intrinsic worth down to trifles which only owed their value to the exquisite delicacy, skill, and taste of the workman. Seeing all this apparent prosperity, how could Raymond place unbounded faith in Roberjot's sombre prophecies? "It is precisely the same thing to-day that it has been for years," he thought. "People take their desires for realities, and I should be very foolish to count on the fall of the empire as the only means of crushing my enemies."

When he reached the room he had taken, he was pleased to find that the upholsterer had kept his promises. Everything was in readiness. He knew—for he had discovered this the evening before—that his view from his window commanded the Maillefert mansion. He opened the window and closed the shutters in such a way that he could see through them perfectly without being seen himself. Then drawing his opera glass from his pocket he scanned the mansion from top to bottom. It seemed as yet hardly awake. In the court-yard the grooms were rubbing down the horses, washing the carriages, and cleaning the harness. On the first floor the windows were open, and footmen in red vests and white aprons were shaking carpets, beating cushions, or dusting the thousand costly ornaments which were as frail and as brilliant as the Second Empire itself.

"Can this luxury be paid for?" said Raymond to himself, thinking of the duchess's extravagance and the constant manner in which she drained poor Simone.

But at this moment he heard the hoofs of a horse resounding on the pavement of the courtyard. He looked down, and beheld a gentleman who was managing a magnificent animal with consummate dexterity. As he dismounted, and threw the reins to a groom, Raymond recognized him. It was Combelaïne. What could he want there at this early hour? And Raymond watched the windows on the second floor, all of which were as yet hermetically closed, and hoped that the blinds of one of them would open and furnish him with some clue.

In this expectation he was not deceived. For, less than a minute after De Combelaïne's entrance, two windows were thrown open by a servant whom Raymond had often seen at Rosiers, and who was no less a personage than the valet of the young duke. And in the brief moment that the windows remained open Raymond caught sight of Philippe in a black velvet dressing-gown standing in front of a mirror, and of De Combelaïne seated in a large arm-chair. But he had no time to see more, for a rumble of wheels was heard, and a dark brougham, drawn by a horse that had cost at least five hundred louis, drove into the court-yard, and, making a semi-circle, drew up before the steps. The porter rang twice. Was the visit expected? At all events a window of the young duke's apartment was hastily thrown open, and De Combelaïne leaned out to see who had arrived. A footman opened the door of the brougham, from which there now alighted a stout man whom Raymond easily recognized as M. Verdale, or rather Baron Verdale. He said something to his coachman, and, like De Combelaïne, entered the mansion.

"Verdale also!" muttered Raymond. "De Maumussy will be here presently."

But he was mistaken. Ten minutes later Philippe de Maillefert left the

house. Contrary to his usual habit, the young man was dressed in black from head to foot, and, as well as Raymond could see, he was extremely pale. Behind him walked Verdale and De Combelaïne in an attitude of solemn dignity, which Raymond was inclined to regard as feigned, for at one moment he noticed a glance and smile exchanged between them, which certainly suggested amusement and satisfaction. They spoke to the young duke as they took their positions, one on each side of him, and went down the steps, much as if they had been his jailers, or rather two surgeons comforting and encouraging a patient about to undergo some hideous operation.

"What on earth are they doing?" said Raymond.

All the servants seemed to be thrilled and mystified. They stood aside and pretended to be busy, but their ears and eyes were on the alert. Could it be a duel? No; for Philippe would not have required encouragement or urging were that the question involved, for, with all his faults, the young duke was no coward. To a last observation of De Combelaïne's he finally snapped his fingers—a gesture which among all nations signifies—"The dice are thrown!—come what will!"

A footman now opened the door of the brougham, Verdale and the duke took their seats, De Combelaïne jumped on the box, and the carriage drove off. But in vain did Raymond watch for its return. One by one the windows of the second floor were opened. The house assumed a look of life, and carriages rolled in and out of the court-yard all day long. Philippe was seen no more—and the duchess and Simone remained invisible.

Tired out at last, Raymond, when night drew near, determined on going back to his mother's, when, all at once, he espied a woman's figure in the court-yard of the mansion. "Miss Lydia Dodge!" he cried. And snatching up his hat he flew down the stairs. It was, indeed, Miss Lydia. She had just turned the corner, when Raymond overtook her. "Miss Lydia! Miss Lydia!" he cried. She turned and stopped short on recognising Raymond. "You here!" she exclaimed.

"Yes, I'm here. Did you think I should stay at Rosiers?" And as she did not answer, he continued, hastily: "Where is Simone?"

"At home. But pray excuse me—this is not at all proper."

She bowed, and turned to leave him, but Raymond detained her by her sleeve.

"Dear Miss Dodge," he said, in a supplicating voice, "I implore you not to leave me like this." He knew the nature of the woman whom he addressed, and so he added gravely: "It may be that my very life depends on your telling me what has taken place."

Miss Dodge reflected, and the expression of her face betrayed that she was having a great struggle with herself. To speak was to violate the principles of her life. "Alas!" she ultimately sighed, "what do you wish me to tell you?"

"Why did Simone leave Maillafert in such haste?"

"I do not know."

"She may not have told you, but haven't you found out?"

"No."

"It must have been a terrible trial to her to come to Paris."

"Terrible!"

It was in a door-way in the Rue de La Chaise that these words were exchanged, and the spot was a most propitious one for a quiet chat, as few persons pass that way. "But come," urged Raymond gently, "there must

have been some explanation between the duke and his sister when they left me alone in the ruins."

"There was," answered Miss Dodge, sententiously. But a moment later the worthy woman seemed to have come to a heroic resolution. "I will tell you all I know, Monsieur Delorge," she said, "and you will see that it is very little. When the duke and his sister left the ruins she took his arm. I was a little in the rear, feeling heartily ashamed, for I knew myself to be in fault. However in my presence they did not exchange one word. When they reached the château they at once went to mademoiselle's little blue sitting-room, where they remained for two hours. I heard the duke's voice, sometimes supplicating, sometimes threatening. To hear the words he spoke it would have been necessary to apply my ear to the key hole; and, for the first time in my life, I was tempted to do so."

"And what did you hear?"

"I heard nothing, for I resisted the temptation. The door at last opened and Monsieur Philippe appeared. He was very pale. As he stood on the threshold he turned and said to his sister: 'I can rely on you, then?' She answered, 'I must have twenty-four hours for reflection.' Whereupon he rejoined, 'So be it—you will telegraph your decision. Don't forget that the honour of our house is in your hands.'"

This narrative confirmed all Raymond's suspicions, but it told him nothing new, nothing which threw any light on the situation. "And then?" he asked.

"The duke left. I ran into the sitting-room and I knelt down beside the poor child, and as I kissed her hands, I asked her to tell me what had happened. I shall never forget her look. I really thought her mind had gone. Then I asked her if I might send for you. She opened her lips as if to speak, but fell back on the sofa. 'No, no,' she said; 'it is not possible; I must not even think of it!' Then she said she wished to be alone, and I left the room."

In this determination to face her sorrow in solitude, Raymond recognised Simone. "And was it then that I got there?" he asked.

"Oh! no, sir, you did not come until long after that, not until after mademoiselle had rang for lights. Hearing some one speak on the stairs, I went out, and then I knew your voice. I was overjoyed, for I felt that God had sent you. But alas! you did not seem to do her any more good than I did; your presence, instead of calming her, only increased her agitation, and after your departure, I saw that your grief had added to hers, for she exclaimed over and over again, 'Poor fellow! poor fellow;' She would not let me remain with her, but I was in the next room, and I heard her walking about all night. It was most distressing. About half-past four she called to me. I ran to her, and when I saw her I caught my breath. Her tears were dried, her eyes glittered, and her face shone with the sublime resolution of a Christian martyr. I knew that her mind was made up. 'Make preparations at once for our departure,' she said. 'What!' I cried 'are we to leave Maillefert?' 'Yes, this very morning, by the eight o'clock train. You see, there is not a minute to lose. Call the servants at once.' At six o'clock everything was ready. Then mademoiselle called the gardener, who is in her confidence, and she told him to harness a vehicle to drive her to the station. He asked her for instruction as to certain matters while she was away; but she said that she had no especial orders to give, that she would probably cease to retain any active charge of her property, and that, in all probability, she should never return to Maillefert. All the

servants were in the passage when she said this, and they heard her. She called them all to her, and gave each of them something as a souvenir, and then some money. The tears came to my eyes, for I likened her to a dying woman distributing her little treasures, which she would never use again. Everybody cried, and everybody crowded round her. Mademoiselle Simone was the only one who retained her self-possession. At last the clock struck seven. 'It is time,' she exclaimed, 'our trunks were brought down,' and, at the last moment, she said to the old gardener: 'Here is a letter for Monsieur Raymond Delorge. I confide it to your care. You are to give it into his hands, but not until this afternoon, you understand me—not before that time.' In another hour we were on our way to Paris in the morning express."

Each word of this narrative showed Simone's indomitable energy. Duty ordered her, she believed, to execute a certain task, and she did so, albeit, with a crushed and bleeding heart. Raymond was the only person in the world who understood all she suffered. "And on arriving in Paris," he asked, "did Simone drive at once to her mother's house?"

"Yes sir, directly. And her arrival was greeted with transports of joy. A queen couldn't have been more *feted*."

"And since then, what life has she led?"

"She has spent all her mornings with lawyers."

"And later in the day?"

"With her mother or mother's friends, Madame de Maumussy and the Baronne de Trigault."

"But does she never go out?"

"I went with her yesterday to Sainte Clotilde to hear mass."

Raymond stored this fact in his memory. "Is she free to go where she chooses?" he asked.

"Free. Of course she is; quite as much mistress of her actions as when at Maillefert. Who would interfere with her?"

"But does she never speak of me?"

"Never, sir. Once, however, I dared to say something to her, and for the first time since I have known her, mademoiselle was quite harsh to me. 'If you mention that name again,' she said, 'I shall be forced to part from you.'"

It was with a despairing gesture that Raymond received this reply "But, Miss Dodge," he exclaimed, "I implore you to tell her that I have met you, that I am desperate, and that I must see her, if it be only for five minutes."

The good-hearted woman stopped him, and carried away by his emotion, and the thought of this great passion, such a one, as she herself had never inspired, she said: "In spite of her injunction I will this very night tell her what you say. Good-bye!"

III.

It was a formidable step for Miss Dodge to take; not that she ran any risk of losing the support of her old age, for she was sure that Simone could never allow her to want for anything; but she felt it possible that Simone might separate from her, and, to her mind, this separation was worse than death. Raymond had left her without giving her any indication of where

she might see him to tell him the result of her step. He had taken no pains to do this, as thanks to the lodgings he occupied, he knew he could always join the governess whenever she went out. He was too much absorbed in wondering what would be Simone's decision to think of much else. Would she consent to this interview which he asked for so earnestly? He was still persuaded that it was only the poor child's fortune that her family coveted, and that if he entreated her to let them have it, he might perhaps win her consent. In fact, he felt so hopeful on this point that when he went home to dinner, his mother said: "You have had a successful day, my son, I see. You have seen our friends, and have learned that we have a firm foundation for our hopes."

"I have seen Monsieur Roberjot," he answered, merely for the sake of saying something.

His mother paid little heed to his vague responses, but such was not the case with Pauline, who, when alone with him after dinner, pressed his hand, and said: "Poor dear Raymond! You are very unhappy!"

He could not restrain a movement of impatience, for he was intensely annoyed by his sister's perseverance in trying to find out his thoughts. "Tell me, child," he said, abruptly, "what notion have you got in your head?"

He looked her straight in the eyes as he spoke. She turned crimson, and trying to conceal her embarrassment under a light laugh, replied: "I don't know, but Monsieur Roberjot takes his political difficulties very differently to you." Her brother did not speak, and the girl added in a serious tone. "I won't insist—and yet, I might perhaps give you some confidences in return."

At another time, Raymond would have asked for an explanation of these words, which were, to say the least, a little singular. But the selfishness of passion restrained him. He merely said to himself: "So Mademoiselle Pauline loves somebody, and this is what renders her so clear-sighted."

He thought nothing more of the matter during the rest of the evening which he spent with his mother and sister, and on retiring to his room his only reflection was that the next day was the 1st of January, and he probably should not have a couple of hours to himself to run to the Rue de Grenelle-Saint-Germain. Madame Delorge, in fact, was in the habit every New Year's Day of receiving the small number of friends who had remained faithful to her. At nine o'clock Madame Cornevin and her daughters arrived, followed by M. Ducoudray, whose eyes were as bright as the brilliants in a pair of ear-rings which he presented to Pauline. M. Roberjot also soon appeared, weighed down by boxes of *bonbons*; and as he entered the room he shouted out: "All hail to 1870, which will give liberty and happiness to France!"

"Amen!" answered Ducoudray.

Raymond went to greet the lawyer, who continued: "In a year from now you will tell me if you can what has become of all these people—the Count de Combelaïne, the Duke de Maumussy, the dear Princess d'Eljousen, to say nothing of my excellent friend Verdale. To-morrow the *Officiel* will speak, and you will see what the new ministry is."

The next day, as Roberjot stated, the *Journal Officiel* published the names of the men chosen by Emile Ollivier, as his colleagues in the administration, which will always be known in history as the "Ministry of the 2nd of January." The truth is that France had a flash of hope and liberty that day. On reading the names of the men who were to take the helm of the State,

the public believed that the ruin which had seemed so imminent would be avoided. They hoped that the horrors of a contest would be averted. "We can breathe once more!" people said to each other. And a general feeling of confidence arose, and a return of commercial prosperity was anticipated.

What became of the theories indulged in by Madame Delorge, who had so long looked forward to the fall of the empire—the fall which would hurl her enemies from the positions they had so long occupied, and place her husband's murderers in her power? And Raymond himself realized that he, too, had been lulled by the deceitful hope that some great political catastrophe, would detach Madame de Maillefert from her new friends, and save Simone. That very evening a letter came from his old friend the baron which confirmed his fears and bade him hasten on with his task. "There are strange reports here," wrote the old engineer. "I am told that Mademoiselle Simone will never return to Maillefert, but has decided to sell all her property, even to the château itself. According to Bizet, who is not such a bad fellow, after all, the sale will take place early in February. But the people about here are quite in despair, as they are told that everything will no doubt be bought up by a great Parisian capitalist. I spare you all comments. You ought to know the truth. Let me hear it, that I may preserve my reputation of being a well-informed man. And pray tell me a little about yourself at the same time."

Alas! Raymond knew no more than did the baron. After reading this letter he started for the Rue de Grenelle-Saint-Germain, where an immense surprise awaited him, for as he took his key from the concierge, the woman exclaimed: "Some one came here for you this morning, sir."

Who could know that he had taken this apartment, and by what name had they asked for him? "Who came for me?" he asked.

"A gentleman, sir. I was just sweeping the stairs when he called."

"And what did he say?"

"He said, 'Is my friend in?' And then I said, 'What friend?' He replied, 'The one who moved in three days ago.' 'Ah! you mean Monsieur de Lespéran?' said I, and he answered, 'Precisely.' When I told him you were out, he seemed very much annoyed, and went away, saying he would call again."

Raymond did not like this, for the mysterious visitor had carefully managed to find out by what name he was known in the house; and this had no doubt been his only object. However Raymond wished to discover if the woman had any suspicions. "It was one of my friends, I presume," he said with affected carelessness. "But why didn't he leave his name?"

"I don't know, I am sure."

"And you didn't ask it? No? Well, that's a great pity. Perhaps you can describe him. Let's see. Was he younger or old?"

"Neither the one nor the other."

"Thin or stout?"

"Medium."

"Dark or light?"

"Oh! light; very light."

Raymond felt that this sort of thing might go on interminably, so he made no further questions. "Another time," he said to the woman, "you had better ask the names of the people who come to see me."

But his indifference was affected, for he clearly realised that he was watched. He thought of Laurent Cornevin, but rejected the idea as the wildest folly. "If Laurent wished to speak to me," he said to himself, "he

would have written to my mother's to appoint a rendezvous." So a new care was added to his life, and a sharp one, too, for he did not take a step without imagining that some one was at his heels; that he was incessantly being watched, and that each of his actions had an invisible witness. This sort of infamy was very like Philippe, and still more characteristic of De Combelaïne.

This day which began so badly, was not destined to end very favourably either. It was in vain that he sat looking out of the window; neither Simone nor Miss Dodge gave any sign of life. Nor was he any more fortunate on the following day, when he literally did not leave his observatory. By the end of the week he did not know what to think. Had Miss Dodge deceived him? Had she pretended to be moved by his entreaties merely to get rid of him? Or had she kept her promise, and been pitilessly dismissed in consequence?

However, on Sunday morning, while Raymond was eating his heart out in despair, he suddenly saw Simone come down the steps. But faithful Lydia Dodge was not with her. She was accompanied by a maid whose face was new to Raymond, and who carried a prayer-book. He hurried down stairs so rapidly that Simone was still in sight when he reached the street. But she was far away, and walking rapidly. It was evident that she was going to Ste. Clotilde. Raymond passed her and looked back. Their eyes met. She started, but went on and entered the church.

"And yet she saw me," he thought. "All hope isn't lost." He was now in an agony to know by which door Simone would leave, so that he might meet her face to face.

Mass being over, she did not immediately rise from her knees, but at last she crossed the nave and went towards the main portal opening on the square.

Raymond who was watching her, thereupon went out by one of the side doors, and reached the bottom of the steps just as she did. He hesitated to speak to her on account of the maid, but she came straight towards him. "You are not acting right, Monsieur Delorge," she said.

He was startled to see how thin and pale she looked. She was the very shadow of herself.

But in a firm, clear voice she continued: "Did you not receive my last letter? Did I not bid you forget me?"

Raymond shook his head. "In that last letter," he replied, "you told me that you were a most unhappy woman. I have therefore come to tell you that my life is devoted to you. Ought I not to know what has happened to you? Have I not a right to ask this? I must see you. I must speak to you."

She hesitated. And then, in a quiet low voice, she said: "Very well. Here. To-morrow. Four o'clock."

There was nothing in Simone's manner, nothing in her words or looks, which could encourage Raymond's hopes. But he would have preferred almost anything to this horrible uncertainty and mystery.

The next day, long before the appointed hour, he was outside Ste. Clotilde, walking slowly round the square. The sky was gray, the weather cold. The garden was deserted, hardly a human being to be seen. Night was coming on earlier than usual on account of the thick fog. At last the clock struck four, and two women appeared—Simone and Miss Lydia. So the poor governess had not been sent away. Simone saw Raymond at a distance and walked towards him. "Give me your arm," she said, as they

met, "and let us walk on." He complied: and after a moment's silence, she said abruptly: "You have had your own way—I am here; you insisted on it."

"I insisted!"

"Certainly; in such a way, too, that it almost amounted to a persecution. Didn't my brother meet you close to our house and was it not owing to his moderation that no altercation took place?"

An exclamation of anger, mingled with regret, escaped from Raymond's lips. "True!" he said, bitterly; "Monsieur Philippe was good enough not to strike me."

"And this is not all. You have won my governess over to your side, and induced her to disobey my orders."

Was this really Simone who spoke? "I wished so much to see you," said Raymond, penitently.

"And why, pray?" asked the young girl, in a cold, constrained tone. "Was it to hear me say what I wrote? Very well then, I will repeat it. We are forever separated. We must forget each other; I choose it to be so."

She spoke clearly and without hesitation, and in such a loud voice that it was fortunate the square was deserted.

"And I," said Raymond, "wish to know your reasons for this separation."

"My reasons!" repeated the young girl, in a tone the haughtiness of which would have done credit to her mother. "Since when, pray, have I ceased to be mistress of my own actions? I do what I please to do!"

Fortunately, there are exaggerations which so exceed all limits that it is easy to divine they are contrary to truth. The more sternly Simone treated Raymond, the better satisfied he was. He stopped short and looked full into the girl's eyes. "You are sublime!" he said.

"Sir!" she stammered, bitterly disconcerted. "Raymond!"

But he went on. "Do you consider me, then, so poor of comprehension that I cannot understand you? Undeceive yourself. You are doing your best to make me love you less. And now that their abominable intrigue tears you from me, you wish to seem as if you renounced me voluntarily. You show your heroism by trying to make me feel a certain contempt for you, thinking that in that way I shall regret you less."

She tried to protest, but her words died away on her lips.

"You forgot the oath we swore to each other," continued Raymond. "We were to fight this battle together, we were to conquer or perish together."

Simone had relied too much on her own strength. "I entreat you," she murmured, "not to speak in this way."

"It must be, for you owe me the truth."

"Then listen," she began; but checking herself with a nervous start, she exclaimed: "No, never! never!"

Raymond felt that victory was about to escape him.

"Must I then save you in spite of yourself?" he cried.

She turned upon him like a flash. "How do you know that I wish to be saved?" she asked. "I ought not to be, and I will not be. It is too late, besides. All that you do now will only tend to render the horrible sacrifice which I have made a useless one. I ought not to have come here. But I trust that you will carry away with you a recollection of poor Simone that will not be without sweetness. For this is the last time we shall ever meet."

"No; I will not allow you to go with those words on your lips."

But she had taken Miss Lydia's arm. "I entreat you," she cried, "don't rob me of my courage; I need it all. Farewell."

When Raymond knew what he was doing, after wandering for hours through Paris, he found himself on one of the boulevards, near a group of men, who were listening to a person who said:

"Victor Noir has been killed by Prince Pierre Bonaparte. I am sure of what I say, for I have just come from Auteuil."

IV

THIS report was true, and darting like a train of gunpowder along the boulevard it spread all over Paris.

On that same afternoon—it was Monday, January 10th, 1870—two journalists, Victor Noir and Ulrich de Fonvielle, called on Prince Pierre Bonaparte, who then lived at Auteuil, in the house once occupied by the philosopher Helvétius. They came at the request of one of their friends, Pascal Grousset, to ask the meaning of certain articles published by the Prince in a journal called *L'Avenir*. The Prince was, that day, expecting the seconds of Henri Rochefort, and these gentlemen were received. Ten minutes later several detonations resounded through the house. Almost immediately a man rushed out, pale and with both hands clasped over his breast. He fell on the sidewalk outside. He was dead. This was Victor Noir.

A moment later another man appeared, pale and terrified, with a revolver in hand. "Let no one enter that house," he cried, "for a murderer lives there." This man was Ulrich de Fonvielle.

Such were the facts which were circulated from mouth to mouth. But what had taken place in the house? No one seemed to know. Public opinion was perplexed, for two parties instantly formed, each claiming to know the truth. According to one account Pierre Bonaparte, attacked and insulted under his own roof, had, in killing Victor Noir, only availed himself of the right which every man possesses to defend himself. According to others, and to the majority of people, there had not been the smallest provocation, and Victor Noir had fallen a victim to a most cowardly attack. Between the two opposing parties there were certain sensible persons who tried to make themselves heard. "Suppose we ascertain the exact truth before we decide?" they said.

But their eloquence was thrown away, for Paris was in a fever. The boulevards were crowded, the cafés vociferous; groups gathered at the corners, and angry murmurs arose while an ominous agitation reigned in the faubourgs.

When Raymond saw his mother that evening he found that she had heard of this event, and was greatly agitated by it. "Is not the finger of God distinctly visible in this?" she exclaimed. "At the very moment when the empire appeared to be gaining strength once more, is there not something absolutely startling in the death of this young man, whose name, yesterday totally unknown, may to-morrow prove a watchword and the rallying-cry of a revolution?"

But Prince Pierre was arrested, and the investigation began. Paris learnt this by the morning papers, which published a statement from the Minister of Justice.

"What's the use?" said Roberjot to Raymond—"what magistrate is

capable of eliciting the truth in this most wretched affair " Then, shaking his head, he added : " Don't you see that this is the beginning of the end ? "

Raymond saw that the *Marseillaise* newspaper came out in mourning, with a leading article, written by Rochefort—a cry of hatred and anger calculated to penetrate into the most secluded workshops. But there was no need of trying to increase the excitement. The greatest optimist must have felt the burning blast of this terrific storm. The 11th was employed in preparations for the funeral, and all day long pilgrimages were made to Neuilly, where Victor Noir's body had been removed. The interment was fixed to take place at the cemetery of Père La Chaise, on the following day, when a cold, icy rain set in.

" If it rains—there will be no trouble," Pétion remarked on a famous occasion during the great Revolution ; but this time there was too much excitement for people to care for the weather. Before daybreak the army, commanded by Marshal Canrobert, was on foot. The garrison from Versailles had been brought into Paris. Troops had been massed on the Champ de Mars, and round about the Palais de l'Industrie, while brigades of police were scattered all along either side of the Avenue de la Grand Armée. An immense crowd surged towards Neuilly, and, amid the throng, circulated a number of newspaper vendors, selling *La Marseillaise* and *L'Eclipse*. The latter journal represented Victor Noir dead, and the hawkers cried aloud : " Two sous for the body !—two sous ! "

It was then one o'clock in the afternoon. The critical moment was approaching. Would there be any military demonstration as the bier entered the cemetery ? Must the friends of Victor Noir take the bier on their shoulders and revolvers in their hands ? Pushed on by the crowd, Raymond found himself in the very front, and almost inside the house of mourning. He saw all the chiefs of this movement pass before him—all those who possessed, or thought they possessed, any influence—all those who were expected to give an order or a signal. It was half-past one when Henri Rochefort, the famous pamphleteer, arrived : he was paler than usual, and his face bore signs of violent emotion. As he entered a small anteroom, next to the apartment where the body lay, he sank on to a chair, and said : " Give me a glass of water ; I am utterly exhausted ! "

In the same room there was an Englishman, who seemed cold, stiff, and impassible. He drew a flask from his pocket, and handed it to Rochefort. " Drink this," he said, " it is rum."

" Thanks ! " replied Rochefort, " I never take anything of the kind."

The Englishman returned the flask to his pocket, and, shrugging his shoulders, said : " You are wrong ; a little rum is a good thing when a man is at the head of a movement like this, and when he is as agitated as you are ; " and, turning to Raymond, who had just entered, he added : " Don't you agree with me, sir ? "

Raymond had no time to reply to this singular person, for people crowded round Rochefort, crying : " What shall be done ? What have you decided on ? "

He hesitated. No doubt he said to himself that if a collision were to take place, this great crowd would be slaughtered ; and that one word from his lips might be the signal for terrible bloodshed.

A man came in with eager eyes—" Shall we march towards Paris ? " he asked.

" Who gave you the right to question me ? " rejoined Rochefort.

" The people, whose representative you are."

"I have no orders to receive from you."

"So much the worse, then!" And jamming his hat down over his eyes, the man went out, pushing his way through the crowd on the staircase.

A moment more and Rochefort followed him. Victor Noir's brother had come for him, and implored him not to allow any bloodshed. The discussion was most violent, but finally the advice of Delescluze* was asked, and it was decided that the interment should take place in the cemetery at Neuilly.

Standing at a window, Rochefort announced this determination to the crowd, saying it was the wish of the family, and should be respected as such. Around the house these words met with approval. But Raymond heard a man in the crowd mutter, "What have the family to do with it? The body belongs to the Democracy. It ought to be borne through Paris!"

The coffin was removed from the house and placed on a funeral car. As soon as it appeared there was a rush and a push among the crowd. Raymond was near the hearse, and a man in a blouse caught him by the throat and threw him back against the wheel. He would have fallen to the ground had not the same Englishman whom he had seen with the flask of rum come to his assistance. He dealt the man in the blouse a formidable blow on the chest, and helped Raymond up again. "In a crowd like this," he said, coldly, "you ought never to allow yourself to be hustled and grasped like that."

"You have in all probability, sir, saved my life——" said young Delorge.

"I should be glad if it were so," interrupted the Englishman; "but it's nothing, I assure you—nothing worth talking about. But excuse me for leaving you so abruptly, the hearse is moving, and I don't wish to lose one detail of the ceremony."

The hearse moved through the immense crowd, and slowly took its way towards the little cemetery of Neuilly. Behind it walked Rochefort and Ulrich de Fonvielle, whose overcoat was literally in rags. And thousands followed—Raymond among them. He had been separated from the Englishman, but he had not lost sight of him for a moment. "What a strange person!" thought Raymond, who was much puzzled.

But he had no time for further reflection. The procession had suddenly halted. "What is the matter?" asked the people round about him; "what has happened?"

Rochefort had succumbed to his emotions, and, fainting away, had been carried into a neighbouring shop. "He's dead," cried the mob.

No; he had but fainted, and it was not long before he recovered. But this incident put an end to all idea of carrying the bier through Paris to Père La Chaise, and lassitude and discouragement began working on this crowd, which had been on foot all day in the mud and rain. It moved on more rapidly to the cemetery at Neuilly, where some friends of Victor Noir uttered a few hot words of vengeance.

When Rochefort was better, he sent for a cab, and ordered the coachman to drive back to Paris. Then those who had declared for war regained heart. In fact, the scene was a terrible one. It was growing dark. The light fog which had followed the rain imparted vague form to everything. The clouds, massed in the west, were tinged by the setting sun with an angry glow. At least two hundred thousand people of all ages and classes were

* The famous agitator who, becoming a member of the Commune in 1871, was shot down behind a barricade when the Versailles troops entered Paris.—*Trans.*

slowly marching towards the Arc de Triomphe, singing revolutionary songs at the top of their voices, and uttering occasional roars like wild beasts. What would happen when this crowd met the police massed around the Arc de Triomphe? Nothing at all happened—the police withdrew and calmly watched the black mass march past them.

"Where are we going?" people asked each other

The column went down the Champs Elysées, and the songs were louder than ever, when all at once, on approaching the open space near the Palais de l'Industrie, the mob came to a stand-still. Here several regiments of cavalry were drawn up, and soon, above the tumult of voices and songs, one could hear the rolling of drums. Rochefort leaped from his cab, and, followed by two friends, approached a commissary of police, who, with his scarf round his waist, stood in advance of the troops, and barred the avenue.

"I wish to pass," said Rochefort.

"You cannot go any farther," answered the commissary.

"But I am Henri Rochefort, a deputy of the Corps Legislatif."

"If you go on," was the reply, "you will be the first man cut down, that's all!"

And thereupon there was a second roll of the drums, and a squadron of cavalry advanced. This time Rochefort had no decision to take. One of those panics which at times sweep through armies like a cloud of dust through the streets, had seized hold of this crowd, whose imprecations had rent the air but a moment before, and, in the twinkling of an eye, it was dispersed. And when Raymond went home again, Paris was as quiet as he had ever known it.

"Well?" cried worthy old Ducoudray, who, owing to a severe cold, had to his great despair, been unable to go to Neuilly.

"Paris is calm," answered the young man, in a gloomy tone; "it's all over—this was but a false alarm!"

Such, however, was not the opinion of M. Roberjot, who, that same evening, called on Madame Delorge, and related how stormy the sitting of the Chamber had been, the new prime minister having exclaimed: "We have been all justice and moderation so far. Now we will use force, if need be." And thereupon Roberjot added that a request for authority to commence proceedings against Rochefort had been sent to the President of the Corps Legislatif, and that it would certainly be granted. "Then we shall see!" he added, rubbing his hands.

Raymond listened, frowning. It was not mere curiosity which had taken him to that day's funeral. He knew that a revolution was his only salvation. If the imperial régime crumbled, De Combelaïne and De Maumussy would surely be crushed by its fall, the duchess and her son would be checked in their wild career, and Simone might perhaps be his. So with the idea of watching the movement, and, perhaps, of assisting in its success, he had gone to Neuilly. He did not repent having done so, but at the close of this terrible day he felt utterly worn out, physically and mentally. Was not Simone lost to him? He knew her well enough to realise that he need never try to change her determination again. He knew that she would heroically and nobly accomplish her sacrifice, without condescending to spare herself a single pang. "I don't choose to be saved," she had said. "Besides, it is too late; you will only render my sacrifices useless."

What sacrifices had she alluded to? He might have submitted to a known and measured catastrophe, but to bend under a mysterious, nameless misfortune struck him as the height of misery and shame.

He loved Simone, and she loved him, and yet they were separated. He was not thirty, but he thought his life finished—his present without hope, his future without promise. Assuredly, but for the thought of his mother, he would have put an end to an existence which had grown well nigh intolerable to him. But had he the right to dispose of himself like that? Would it not be an act of utter baseness to abandon this noble woman, who only lived for the sake of her children? One night her murdered husband had been brought home to her. Was the body of her son, killed by his own hand, also to be carried through her door. "I must continue to live," thought Raymond.

His father's murder had not been avenged. And the murderers, were they not the same wretches whom he suspected of having originated this dark intrigue which was killing Simone by inches?

The empire was still audacious in its iniquity, and Raymond determined to enroll himself among the dissatisfied—among those who were always plotting, and always ready for a rising, arms in hand.

As M. Roberjot had foreseen, the shock caused by Victor Noir's death, and the scenes at his funeral, increased rather than diminished. The Cabinet of the 2nd of January had not perceived this event on the cards the day it undertook to rule France. The force of events led Emile Ollivier on a fatal descent, from which he could not rise again, and he slipped lower and lower without the smallest idea what he should find at the end of his fall. The Chamber authorized proceedings against Rochefort on account of his article in *La Marseillaise*—and he was condemned to six months' imprisonment and to three thousand francs fine. This occurred on January 22nd. No one supposed, however, that this judgment would be carried into execution. People were mistaken. On the 7th of February, Raymond had gone to the Chamber to hear what was going on, when he met Roberjot, who, heated by debate, had come outside for fresh air. "It is a vote, and no mistake," he said. "The Chamber authorizes the arrest and fine."

"It's terrible," rejoined Raymond.

It was certainly a very bold proceeding to arrest a man whose popularity was then literally boundless. Many revolutions have often succeeded which had less to start from. However, the ministry were committed to this course, and the order for arrest was given.

That same evening, as Rochefort was passing along through the Rue de Flandres, on the way to the printing office of *La Marseillaise*, he was arrested and carried off in a cab, hastily summoned from the stand hard by.

He was perfectly calm, and begged his friends to make no appeal to the people. The request was futile. There was a public meeting that night at the Café Favié in the Rue de Monilmontant, and Flourens, who presided, jumped upon a bench and summoned his adherents to arms, after which, pointing a revolver at a commissary of police, who chanced to enter the establishment, he exclaimed: "I arrest you! not one word, or I shoot you where you stand!"

For the second time within a month Raymond held his breath, waiting for the explosion which he expected would follow. Indeed a formidable uproar succeeded Flourens's words, and folks applauded the desperate act by which he tried to set the ball a rolling. There were three hundred men in that café, and all swore with frightful oaths that there must and should be a change of government. Outside, the crowd was constantly increasing. Most of the street lamps had been extinguished, and groups of men and even women had gathered at all the corners. Flourens, who was always

ready to believe what he wished, always prepared to accept the chimeras of his imagination for facts, considered that Paris was ripe for a revolution. He left the café, and still holding his revolver pointed at the commissary, he went through the faubourg. Some sixty young men followed him. They were unarmed, but they kept up their courage by bellowing wild songs.

Carried away by his own private wrongs, Raymond began himself to address the crowd, and proposed to march on Sainte Pélagie, and deliver Rochefort, when all at once a hoarse voice interrupted him with the words: "That is a nice proposal indeed. This fellow wishes to get us out of the faubourg to deliver us up to the police. But we know him."

Raymond began to protest, but very uselessly. His air and manner, clothes, voice and way of speaking were all against him. "You are a spy!" said a stout young fellow, elbowing him roughly.

It was so dark that Raymond could not see the faces of those around him. Quite new to these scenes of tumult, he tried to make himself heard. But suddenly the cry was raised: "Let us settle the spy!" And at the same moment he was caught round the shoulders and by the legs by lithe vigorous arms. "To the canal with him! To the canal!" cried the crowd. Raymond realized his danger. With a sudden effort he loosened the arms round his shoulders, with a kick he sent the fellow who had him by the legs rolling in the gutter, and then setting himself firmly, he clenched his fists and cried: "Look out!"

There were ten seconds' hesitation, but the group was like tinder, these words were a match, and the affair would have ended disastrously had not a tall fellow in a blouse sprang before young Delorge exclaiming: "I know the citizen. He's as true as steel!"

"He's a spy!" howled the crowd.

"A spy," repeated the man with an oath. "Where's the fellow who dares to say that a friend of mine is a spy? Just let him come forward and say it to me!"

There was no reply, whereupon the man drew Raymond out of the crowd and as soon as they were beyond hearing, exclaimed: "Be off with you! Your place isn't here."

"And yet——"

"Keep your courage for a better occasion."

"What! Hasn't the contest already begun?"

The man shrugged his shoulders, and, in a tone of utter contempt, replied, "The contest! You believe in one, do you?"

He turned away, but Raymond stopped him. "At least tell me your name, so that I may know to whom I am indebted."

The man seemed to consider this question a very natural one. "I am called Tellier," he said, "I'm a workman at the Entrepot."

"My name is Raymond Delorge, and I should like——"

"To pay for drinks! Oh, yes, I see. But all the wine shops are shut." And darting off, he was soon lost in the darkness.

Raymond stood still looking and listening. The excitement in the faubourg seemed to him to be too great to be easily calmed. Men were hurrying past seemingly on their way to some rendezvous, and the cab-drivers were whipping up their animals, as if they feared that their vehicles would be seized to form a barricade.

"I must see some more," said Raymond to himself. "I cannot go home now!" And he hurried towards a spot where a loud din was being kept up.

It was Flourens and his little band, all singing the "Marseillaise" at the top of their voices. Flourens himself was beginning to feel that he was the victim of his own illusions, for, although the windows were thrown open as he passed, and inquisitive heads peered out of the houses, only imprecations answered his stormy appeals. He obtained no fresh support, and indeed his followers were steadily decreasing, as they fell off to answer the questions of lookers on. He had confidently expected to find an army at Belleville, but he merely met about a hundred men insufficiently equipped, "If we only had some arms!" was the cry.

Then the singular idea struck him there would, at least, be some guns in the property-room at the Belleville theatre. But when he arrived there all his followers had slunk away, and, but for one boy of seventeen, he would have been altogether alone. Quite desperate, he regained the street, his overcoat over his arm, a revolver in one hand, and a sword in the other. He then began to rush about in search of combatants and paving stones. However, he found the police, who were dispersing the last remnants of the crowd, and, with difficulty escaped from their clutches. And when, about midnight, Raymond returned to his mother's house, he said to Ducoudray, who was waiting there: "Things are all smooth again!"

The worthy old man shrugged his shoulders. "In my time," he replied, "in 1830, it would have ended very differently."

V

But things were not so smooth as Raymond fancied. If February 8th passed off quietly enough during the daylight, at nightfall the fever began again. A dozen barricades were thrown up in the Rue de Paris, at Belleville, in the Rue Saint Maur, the Rue de la Douane, and the Faubourg du Temple. And, on the next evening, fresh scenes of disorder occurred. The riots was confined, however, to Belleville and the Faubourg du Temple. And, as during the previous summer, loungers went out with cigars in their mouths, after dinner, to look on and amuse themselves. But their amusement was of short duration, for, on the 10th, after three or four hundred arrests, the streets resumed their usual aspect, and it seemed probable that Rochefort would spend his six months in prison.

"Probable, of course," said Roberjot; "but by no means certain." And although frankly confessing that such scenes detached timid souls from the cause of liberty, he complacently proceeded to enumerate all the storms which were gathering on the Imperial horizon; speaking of the trial of Prince Pierre Bonaparte, by the High Court of Justice, the strikes which were being constantly organized among the working classes, the stagnation of trade, and the general uneasiness felt in regard to the future.

But Raymond had other cares. Reasoning carefully, he had begun to suspect a connection between the mysterious visitor, who had called at the Rue de Grenelle and certain events of the preceeding days. At Neuilly, at the funeral of Victor Noir, he would have been thrown down and trampled upon but for the interference of an unknown individual, an Englishman of most eccentric appearance. On the evening of Rochefort's arrest, a workman had appeared at the very nick of time, and rescued him from a group of furious malcontents.

These two circumstances which had not struck him at the time now assumed the greatest possible significance in his eyes; and he asked himself

if the mysterious visitor, the Englishman at Neuilly, and the workman in the blouse were not one and the same person. And who could this person be, if not Laurent Cornevin? He possessed a means, a method of verifying the exactitude of his conjectures, at least up to a certain point. The workman had told him that his name was Tellier, and that he was employed at the Entrepot. "I will at once ascertain," said Raymond, "if this man is to be found; but I feel certain he is not there. If my suspicions are correct he gave me a false name and a false address."

An hour later he alighted from a cab in the Rue de Flandres, and patiently began his investigations. He found that the name of Tellier was utterly unknown at the Entrepot. In vain did he question every one, from the foremen to the lowest workmen. No one had ever seen or heard of a man named Tellier. "That's precisely what I imagined," said Raymond to himself as he turned his face homewards.

Now, the question arose how he might put himself into communication with Laurent Cornevin, and finally, after long meditation, Raymond thought he had found a means. "If Laurent is thus watching over me," he said, "it is because he feels a sincere and deep affection for me. If he knew my unhappiness, he would do his best to assist me; so I have only to acquaint him with it."

Accordingly young Delorge wrote this letter: "You came to inquire for Monsieur de Lespéran, Are you the man I suppose—the old friend and partner of Monsieur Pécheira? If so, I entreat you, in the name of Heaven, to let me see you and speak to you. Need I swear the most profound secrecy? My happiness—my very life—are at stake!" Raymond placed this urgent entreaty in an envelope, and, after sealing it in a way to defy prying curiosity, he confided it to the concierge of the Rue de Grenelle-Saint-Germain, and begged her to hand it to the first person who came to ask for him by name.

Of course this was a very frail chance on which to fasten his hopes, but at all events it gave him courage to seem interested in the new arrangements which were contemplated by his mother, who, delighted that her son would now be with her in Paris, had rented a small apartment adjoining her own, and opened doors of communication. This gave her two rooms for Raymond's especial use; and she arranged them charmingly, decorating them with many of the pictures and art treasures she had inherited from the Baron de Glorière. To these same rooms she also carried the portrait of General Delorge. "It belongs to you by right, my son," she said, "it will remind you of the past and of your duty, if you are ever in danger of forgetting it."

But there was little danger of forgetfulness on Raymond's part. Each hour of the last month had added another drop of bitterness to the fury that raged in his heart. To crush Combelaïne and Maumussy was the one idea that haunted him. It was with this idea, indeed, that he joined one of the secret societies which were undermining the empire. This society met at a little house in the Rue des Cinq Moulins, at Montmartre, and was called "The Society of the Friends of Justice." An ex-representative was at its head, and a large number of lawyers, artists, and medical students, were among its members. They met in the evening, twice or three times in the week. The avowed aim of the society, in case the police discovered its existence, was the propagation of democratic journals and books, but its real object was to recruit and arm a body of men in the provinces, which, at the first signal, would appear and assist the Parisians in winning the victory.

Raymond never knew the precise strength of this society, but once he heard the president say: "We have over fifty thousand guns."

Was this the truth? Raymond could not answer this question to his own satisfaction. He was not long in seeing, however, that his new friends had no great confidence in immediate success, and that if he achieved his own ends, it would not be through them.

With all his thoughts directed toward the mysterious visitor—whom he steadfastly imagined to be Cornevin—he repaired each day to the Rue de Grenelle to ask the concierge if anyone had been there. "No one," she replied, for four days in succession.

But on the fifth, as soon as Raymond opened the door, she exclaimed: "He has been here!"

Raymond's surprise was so great that he turned pale. "And you gave him my letter?" he asked.

"Of course."

"And what did he say?"

"He seemed very much astonished at your leaving a letter for him; and he turned it over and over in his hand. At last he opened it, and turned as red as a beet when he read it. He exclaimed: 'Good God!' and went right off."

Raymond was greatly disturbed, but he preserved an unmoved countenance; for he felt that the keen black eyes of the concierge were rivetted on him. "And is that all my friend said?" he asked.

"Yes, sir; every word."

"And did he say nothing about leaving an answer?"

"No."

"Nor did he ask at what hour he would find me in?"

"Not he. He swore like a trooper, and ran away like a madman."

Raymond did not dare ask another question, for the woman's curiosity was evidently aroused, and he had no means of judging whether she would prove an ally or an enemy. So he laughed carelessly as he turned away, saying: "I will arrange all that."

He took his key and locked himself in his room, where he could abandon himself to the terrible apprehensions which assailed him. If the story told by the concierge was correct—and he had every reason to believe it was—the man to whom his letter was given was not Laurent Cornevin. Was it possible he had been unfortunate enough to assist his mortal enemies by revealing Cornevin's existence to them. "I fear I am fatal to everyone who is interested in me!" he muttered, as he paced the room in agony of mind.

He scarcely glanced at the Maillefert mansion that day, but towards evening he went and looked out. The weather was mild; the windows of the mansion were open, and, some six or eight men, white-cravated, pale, and solemn, were seated round a table covered with papers. What did this gathering mean? wondered Raymond. However, soon afterwards lamps were brought in, and the servants closed the windows. He could see no more.

"I shall not come again," he thought, as, utterly depressed and discouraged, he started homewards. But he had scarcely turned the corner than he heard himself called. It was the voice of Miss Dodge, and on recognising it he rushed towards her.

She seemed very much startled by her own audacity, and trembled like a leaf, looking round her with a frightened gaze. "For three days," she said, "I have been trying to see you."

On hearing this, Raymond felt that some new misfortune awaited him. 'Did Mademoiselle Simone send you?' he asked.

"No; it is entirely without her knowledge that I have been watching for you."

"What has happened. Tell me at once."

"Mademoiselle is to be married. I heard her give her promise to her mother."

This frightful intelligence, after all that Simone had said, was quite unexpected by Raymond. "Simone to be married!" he gasped—"and to whom?"

"Ah! that I don't know. But I do know that it will kill her. She is dying, Monsieur Delorge—I tell you she is dying! And realizing this as I do, I determined to find you. What is to be done?"

This was the problem which had faced Raymond now for months, and to the elucidation of which he had applied all his intelligence—all his energy. "What is to be done?" he exclaimed, wildly. "Ah! who knows? To live in this way—to be always struggling in the darkness, without one ray of light to guide me; to be surrounded by enemies, and yet never meet them face to face; to be constantly struck at, and yet never see where the blows come from. Ah! if Simone would only have consented! But, no! It is she who has tied my hands and reduced me to this miserable position, to this humiliating existence, to this endless contest! It pleased her to sacrifice herself, and she has done so! I shall perish with her, but little does she care! No, no, Miss Dodge, Simone never loved me!"

With an indignant gesture, as if she heard an absolute blasphemy, the governess exclaimed: "You have not understood me! I tell you, mademoiselle will not live until the marriage!"

Raymond checked himself suddenly. The very violence of his emotion ended by giving him that lucidity peculiar to mad men, and which often imparts an appearance of logic to their acts. "Let us consult," he said, in a constrained voice, "for we are only losing our time in vain words. Have you the slightest idea of the stratagem that was employed to bring Simone to Paris?"

"I only know that M. Philippe was in some way compromised, and that she alone could save him by making great sacrifices."

"Then she has abandoned her fortune to him?"

"I think so."

"Then I understand perfectly. But the marriage?"

"It seems it is as essential to M. Philippe's welfare as the money was."

"And you have no idea who the miserable coward may be who wishes to marry Simone?"

"None whatever."

Raymond little thinking of the spies who might be hanging round about, had raised his voice. He saw nothing that was going on near him. He did not notice that a man of suspicious appearance was smoking his pipe under a doorway close by. "When did you first hear of the marriage?" he asked.

"On the day before yesterday."

"And in what way?"

The poor Englishwoman was on pins and needles. "I declare," she exclaimed, "I don't know what I ought to do or say. My profession has sacred obligations. Certain confidence has been placed in me."

Raymond stamped his foot impatiently. "Tell me at once," he said.

"Well, then, the day before yesterday M. Philippe went out early in a carriage."

"With whom?"

"Alone, sir—and when he came in, about eleven, to breakfast, he was so pale and agitated that I felt, when I met him on the stairs, that something bad was impending. He called his valet, and said to him, 'Go to the duchess and beg her to receive me at once.' I divined that an explanation was about to take place, and I instantly went up to the suite of rooms occupied by Madame de Maillefert, and entered the sitting-room next her bedchamber. Hardly had I got there than I heard M. Philippe talking with his mother. His first words were, 'Are we being abominably fooled!' And then he went on talking so fast that I could scarcely distinguish a word—only here and there disconnected phrases. He said that it was an abuse of confidence; that all was lost; that it was the height of impudence, and that he would blow out his brains. The duchess all the while uttered angry exclamations. I heard her say over and over again, 'It must and shall be done.' She rang her bell, and when one of her maids appeared she dispatched her with a message for Simone to come to her at once. And mademoiselle obeyed; but what took place then I don't know, for they all spoke in whispers. I can only tell you that when my poor young lady left the room she was as white as a lily, and she said to me: 'I am to be married—but I shall not live!'"

Now that Miss Dodge was well started with her tale it was best to allow her to go on until she stopped of herself; but Raymond nevertheless interrupted her.

"You love Simone," he said, "you are really attached to her. Do you wish to save her?"

"Oh! sir——"

"Then take me to her this moment."

Miss Lydia started back, looking at Raymond in absolute horror. "I," she answered,—“I take you to my young lady?"

"Yes."

"To the house, do you mean?"

"Precisely."

"But it is an utter impossibility."

"Nothing is easier. You will take my arm, and we will boldly enter the house. When the servants see me with you they will not ask a question."

"But madame——"

"She is always out at this hour."

"M. Philippe may be there."

Raymond with difficulty repressed a threatening gesture. "If he be there so much the better."

"What are you saying? Great heavens!" replied the poor governess, and she throw up her arms in despair, forgetting the impropriety of such a gesture in the open street. "You are mad!" she exclaimed.

Perhaps she was not far wrong, for Raymond had reached a point when he cared for nothing. "I must see Simone—I intend to see her," he resumed, in that harsh fierce tone which men use in decisive moments, "and there is no time to lose."

"She will not allow you to finish one sentence. She will be displeased by your audacity, and bid you leave her at once."

"Come, Miss Dodge."

But the poor woman rejected the arm which Raymond offered, and

looked as if she were about to fly off. "And what do you think will become of me?" she asked. "My young lady will send me away from her at once."

"Do you prefer she should die?"

"I shall be disgraced."

To discuss this subject would only show the poor woman all the risks she ran. Raymond saw this at once. "Miss Dodge," he said, peremptorily, "take my arm. Time is passing."

Subjugated and losing her head, she obeyed him and took a few steps, but when she reached the open gateway of the house, she hastily withdrew her hand. "I cannot," she cried, "I will not!"

Raymond did not speak. He caught her hand, drew it once more through his arm, and dragged her into the court-yard. Two or three servants looked round with an astonished air. But he went up the steps, and once in the vestibule, he released the poor woman's arm. "Now," he said, "show me where to go."

She no longer made the smallest attempt at resistance. She tottered up the grand staircase, and on the second landing said to Raymond: "Wait here for me; I will go and tell her."

"By no means," answered Raymond. "Go on; I'll follow."

"But——"

"Go on, I say. Would you give her time for reflection?"

More dead than alive she obeyed; and turning into a dark passage she opened the door of a small sitting-room where a lamp was burning. "Mademoiselle," she began.

But Raymond did not allow her to say any more. He pushed her aside, and entered the room.

"It is I!" he exclaimed.

Simone was sitting at a small table, looking through a pile of papers. At the sound of Raymond's voice she started up with such violence that her chair was overturned. She receded to the very wall, with her arms extended. "Raymond," she murmured.

Alas! it was only necessary to look at her to understand Miss Lydia's fears. The poor girl was a mere shadow of herself. Marble was never whiter than her face. Her slender hands were transparent like wax. Nothing was left of her former self except her magnificent eyes. They had all their former clearness, with the addition of pure glitter. The colour at last rose to her cheeks; and having recovered in some measure from her surprise, she exclaimed in a haughty tone: "By what right do you intrude here? You must surely be mad!" and she pointed to the door.

Raymond did not move. "Perhaps I am mad," he answered, with great bitterness. "I am told that you are about to marry."

She looked at him full in the face, and in a voice that did not even tremble, she replied: "And you have been told the truth."

When Raymond entered the house, he still doubted, in spite of what Miss Dodge had told him, and even at this very moment, with Simone's voice ringing in his ear, he had a vague feeling of wonder. He asked himself if he were not dreaming. "I will not allow it!" he cried.

Simone drew her slender figure erect. "By what right will you interfere?" she asked.

"By the right given to me by your love and your promises. Have you forgotten that you said to me, with your head on my heart, 'A girl like myself loves but once in her life. She is the wife of the man she loves, or she dies unmarried.'"

When Miss Dodge had entered the room, she had sank almost fainting on the chair nearest the door. By degrees, however, her senses had come back to her. She was shocked at Raymond's violence, and terrified that he should speak so loud, at the risk of been heard all over the house.

"In the name of heaven, sir!" she exclaimed.

But, with a gesture, Simone stopped her. "Let him speak," she said, "it is only right that not one pang should be spared me!"

But her tone betrayed such agony of suffering that Raymond checked himself, ashamed of his own vehemence. "You will never know what I have endured," he murmured.

"I know that you are inflicting the most useless torture on me, and that it would be more generous on your part to leave me."

"Not until I have spoken, and said what I came to say." With these words he approached her, and in a voice that vibrated with passion, he resumed: "I have come to show you the position in which we both stand. Above all conventional rules, there is the sacred right—the duty which belongs equally to all of God's creatures—of defending their lives and happiness. We have a right to do so. Give me your hand, and leave this house now with me. It is only to obtain your fortune that they clamour for your person. Give them your millions. Money! What is that to us—to you and me? Can I not work and give you a home? Come! If you are not falser than any woman that breathes, you will come."

Simone's serenity was only comparable to that of a martyr, standing, resigned, in the arena, and offering her soul to God while wild beasts tear out her entrails. "My destiny is fixed," she said. "No one in the wide world can change it now. I devote myself to an interest that I regard as superior to my life. Do not be jealous. I have broken no promises, for no other man will ever take me in his arms. Death will hold me in its cold grasp, Raymond. An abyss of shame has opened, and my poor body is needed to fill it up. Do you see now?"

Raymond did not speak. The oppressive silence was only broken by the sobs of poor Miss Dodge.

"Very well," he said, "I will go as soon as you tell me what sacred cause it is, to which you thus sacrifice yourself. I have a right to know and judge it. Do you not sacrifice my life as well as your own?"

"It is a secret that must be buried with me."

Raymond's anger was becoming uncontrollable. "And this is all you will say," he replied. "I have but one thing more to do."

"And what is that?"

"I shall find your brother, and hold him accountable for the horrible wrong he is doing you."

Mademoiselle de Maillefert started forward.

"No—you will not do that?" she said.

"I will do it—so truly as there is a God in heaven. Who will prevent me?"

"I will," said Simone; and she grasped Raymond's hand and pressed it with a strength of which he had not believed her capable. "I will," she repeated, "if my voice has still any power to reach your heart. I will pray to you on my bended knees to relinquish this intention. Would you embitter my dying moments by compelling me to feel that I have sacrificed myself uselessly?"

He did not reply to this question. "At least," he said, "you can tell me the name of the man you are to marry?"

"Would it make any difference to you?" she stammered; "would you be more or less unhappy according to the name of the person I married?"

"I choose to know."

At this moment a voice behind him replied: "Mademoiselle de Maillefert marries the Count de Combelaïne."

With a great start, as if he had received a sword thrust in his back, Raymond turned round, and found himself face to face with the duchess and her son. They had returned home together, and as they came up the stairs they had heard Raymond's ringing voice, and had hurried to the room.

"I repeat," said the duchess, "that my daughter marries Monsieur de Combelaïne."

Raymond had heard her the first time she said this—had heard her only too distinctly—and if he did not speak, it was because words were powerless to express his feelings. "It is a lie!—a disgraceful lie!" he said, at last.

"Ask my sister," said Philippe, with that peculiar motion of the body which amounted in him almost to a nervous affection. This time he shook from head to foot, and his teeth fairly chattered.

Raymond turned to Simone. "Am I to believe your mother?" he asked.

"Yes," she answered feebly but distinctly.

Raymond tottered—the room grew dark to him—and he grasped his head with both hands. "Thou hearest, O God of Love and Mercy! Thou hearest! She consents to become the wife of Combelaïne!—she!—Simone!" Then all at once, blinded by the blood that rushed to his head, he snatched hold of Simone's arm. "Do you know who this man is?" he asked.

"Yes, I know," she replied, faintly.

"Do you know that it is this very man who basely murdered my father, General Delorge?"

Simone sank back in her chair. "You told me all that," she said.

"And you will marry him?"

"Yes."

Dizzy with horror, Raymond stood still for a moment, and then turning to the duchess, said: "And you madame—will you give your daughter to such a man?"

The duchess hesitated. Then: "In families like ours," she replied, "necessities—reasons—often arise which are all paramount. My daughter has told you that it is of her own free will that she devotes herself——"

"Of her own free will!" interrupted Raymond.

Madame de Maillefert stopped him, and in a tone, the sincerity of which struck him even at that moment, she said: "I assure you that if it were in my power to break off this marriage I would do so."

"In your power!" repeated Raymond. And turning to the young duke, he said: "What Madame la Duchesse cannot do you, Monsieur le Duc, the head of this noble house, the depository of the unsullied honour of twenty generations——"

"You heard my mother, sir."

"Madame la Duchesse is a woman, while you are a man. Has the sword bequeathed to you by your ancestors, become so rusty in the scabbard, that you must accept this humiliation?"

Philippe flushed scarlet. "Sir!" he stammered; "sir——."

"Philippe!" exclaimed the duchess.

"It is true," continued Raymond, with intense sarcasm, "it is true that the Count de Combelaïne is looked upon as a man greatly to be feared. He was once accustomed to the daily use of a sword."

The duke started forward and his glass fell from his eye. "You must account to me for these words, sir!" he cried.

But Simone advanced like a spectre and passed between the two young men. "Not another word, Philippe," she said.

"What! not when I am insulted like that?"

"I wish it. And I have paid dearly enough for the right to express my wishes. And you, Raymond, will admit that it would be unworthy of you to taunt a man who will not answer."

Raymond was silenced. He had begun to notice the extraordinary patience shown by the duchess, and to wonder at it.

"It is not generous, sir," she said gently, "to add to our trials. I understand and feel for your sorrow, and I can excuse it so entirely that I do not even ask you to account for your presence here. Believe me, when I tell you, that we suffer also. But life has inexorable necessities. If it were even to kill us all at one blow this marriage must take place."

"It must take place," repeated the young duke.

Raymond looked drearily round in the room, and in an icy tone, which contrasted strangely with his previous violence, he said: "And I, by all that I hold most sacred in this world—by the memory of my murdered father—assure you that this marriage will never come to pass."

"What do you—what can you hope to do?"

"That is my secret. Only, the solemn oath I have just sworn, you may repeat to Monsieur de Combeldaine. Perhaps it will cause him to reflect."

He knelt beside Simone, who had lost all consciousness. He took both of her hands and kissed them, murmuring some words that were inaudible, and then staggering to his feet he left the room.

VI.

THERE must have been an enormous interest at stake to compel the Duchess de Maillefert, usually so haughty and violent, to the constraint of the last twenty minutes.

"Well!" said Philippe, as Raymond's footsteps died away on the staircase. "Well."

"Well!" answered the duchess. "Did I not warn you that such a scene as this would surely take place? Did you not expect it?"

"And I have been insulted under my own roof by a man whom I could not call to account. Ah! why did I not listen to you?"

Madame de Maillefert sighed impatiently. "It is true," she said, "that we have been trifled with."

"But who would ever have expected such an amount of impudence?" said Philippe. "Let him look out, though, for I have not said my last word."

"True," said the duchess, "you have still some reason to hope. Everything depends on the next few days."

The duke interrupted his mother with a long, irreverent whistle. "Meanwhile M. Delorge will set everything and everybody by the ears," he exclaimed. "Combeldaine is quite capable of believing that he does it at our instigation."

"M. Delorge will not carry his threats into execution."

"You are mistaken, mother. The fellow is simple and sentimental, but he is in deadly earnest."

Miss Dodge, hurrying to Simone's assistance, recalled the duchess to circumspection.

"Hush!" she said, lowering her voice; "Simone will soon change all that. Her empire over M. Delorge is absolute. She will even be able to induce him to leave Paris. Perhaps she had better write to him to come and see her again."

"And if Delorge finds Combelaïne here to-night?"

"He won't, I'm sure. Now go and I will speak to your sister."

But the duchess was wrong. Raymond, on leaving the Maillefert mansion, was a very different man to what he had been on entering it. He understood that De Combelaïne and the De Mailleferts hated each other, as is often the case when booty has to be divided, and so he had arranged a simple plan, which he was determined to carry out with all the *sang-froid* of a man to whom life is utterly valueless. He would go the Count de Combelaïne and say to him: "I love Mademoiselle de Maillefert, and she is utterly indifferent to you. I am beloved by her. She hates you. It is her fortune you want—take it. But as for marrying her, you need not dream of it, for I will blow out your brains first. And I will do it!" Raymond said to himself, "just as I would blow out those of a mad dog!"

While reflecting in this manner he reached the Champs Elysées, and turned his steps towards the charming mansion for which De Combelaïne was indebted to imperial generosity. Raymond rang at the bell, and when the door was opened, he asked: "Is the count at home?"

"No, sir."

"I have come on most important business. I must see him."

The servant had no time to answer, for at this moment an elegant brougham drew up outside, and a lady alighted and went up the steps as if she were at home.

But the servant stepped forward and barred her passage, saying firmly but respectfully: "The count is not at home, madame."

The lady looked at him from head to foot, and replied: "You are new in this house, I see, and probably do not know who I am."

"You are mistaken, madame, I know very well."

"Then move aside, so that I may pass."

"I cannot, madame, for I have received my orders from my master."

"The woman stood in such a position that the light fell on her face. She was one of those persons who are only found in Paris, and who are indebted to incessant care and mysterious secrets of the toilette table for the privilege of prolonging their summer into autumn. She was over thirty. But how much—five, ten, or fifteen years? This question was a difficult one to decide on. However, the more Raymond examined her, the more convinced he was that he had seen her before.

"Call Leonard," she said, in a tone of command.

This was the Count de Combelaïne's confidential servant. "Monsieur Leonard is no longer here, madame," said the servant.

"Leonard not here!"

"No, madame, he has left the count's employment for that of an English lord, who pays him enormous wages."

The lady tore her gloves off her hands in a rage. "Then go you to the count and tell him that I am here—here at his door, waiting."

"But he is out, madame. I swear to you that he is out," the poor man replied. "Just as you drove up, I was telling this gentleman the same."

The lady turned, and as she scanned Raymond she uttered a startled

exclamation. "I will come back," she said. And then addressing Raymond, she added: "Will you have the kindness to assist me to my carriage?"

Raymond complied; and when she had settled herself among her cushions, she said to him in a low voice: "If I am not mistaken, you are M. Raymond Delorge?"

"I am, madame."

"The general's son?"

"Yes."

She hesitated for a moment, and then resumed: "Tell my coachman to drive home by the Champ Elysées, and then take a seat by my side."

Raymond's situation had become so desperate that he was ready for anything. He would even have entered the carriage of his infernal majesty in the mood in which he then found himself. So he obeyed this woman, who, when the door was shut and the carriage had started, said: "You do not know me, I see."

"I am sure you are not unknown to me," he replied. And indeed he had been cudgeling his memory most ineffectually concerning her.

"I must put you on the track, I fear," she remarked. "You have not seen me for years—sixteen or eighteen, perhaps. How time passes! I was then a young woman and you a child. Still my name has been mentioned too often at your mother's for you to have forgotten me, I am sure." But Raymond was by no means enlightened. "In those days your friends—Monsieur Roberjot especially—fancied that I must be able to serve you all. Now do you know? Not yet! Did not the mother of one of your school-friends have a sister?"

Raymond started to his feet so hastily that his hat was crushed against the top of the carriage. "Flora Misri!" he cried.

In a tone of annoyance his companion replied: "I was called so, certainly, some years ago, but now and for some time past my friends have spoken of me as '*Madame Misri*.'"

Raymond stammered forth an excuse, which she quickly interrupted.

"That will do," she said. "If I asked you to take a seat in my carriage it was because I had something to tell you which could not fail to interest you."

"Madame!"

"You need not be so astonished. Without your suspecting it, your interests and mine are the same just now. Listen to me: You have been wishing to marry for the last three months, have you not?"

For the last minute or two Raymond had been expecting a question of this kind, so he was on his guard, and answered in a tolerably cool tone: "That is a difficult question to answer."

"Why dispute about words?" answered Madame Misri, with a frown. "There has certainly been some talk of your marriage."

"You are right, madame," he replied; for, after all, what was the use of denying it.

"The young lady is rich, I hear."

"Enormously so."

"She is Mademoiselle de Maillefert, I believe?"

Raymond's embarrassment was increased by the darkness which concealed the woman's countenance. There is nothing so trying as a conversation in the dark. The speakers are like two duelists who fight in the dark, sword in hand. He felt certain that she was in a state of rage, and he realized that he was himself in a most critical position, and that every-

thing depended on his prudence and skill. And so measuring each word he uttered, he slowly said: "I certainly had reason to hope that Mademoiselle de Maillefert would be my wife."

"Does she love you?"

"I think so."

"And her family repels you?"

"Absolutely."

"In order that she may marry a man whom she ought to hate?"

"I fear so."

Madame Misri, in her turn, wished she could see Raymond's face; but being unable to do so, she did what would never have occurred to a man. She leaned forward and took his hand. "Do you know the man who proposes to rob you of the woman you love?"

"No," he answered, boldly.

"Why tell this falsehood? You know perfectly well that your rival is Monsieur de Combelaine."

Raymond did not reply.

"What were you going to see him for?"

Still he did not speak. He fancied he saw a ray of hope in the horizon.

"You meant to quarrel with him," she said—"to challenge him?"

"Monsieur de Combelaine would not fight with me, madame."

She started. "To be sure. I remember that once you sent your seconds to him, and that he positively refused to meet you. You must hate him?"

"Is it not natural to hate the man who robs me of the girl I love?"

"And that is not all," said Madame Misri, slowly.

"What then?"

"It is said that it was not in a duel that he killed General Delorge."

A cold dew of agony broke out on Raymond's brow. "And are people wrong in saying that?" he asked, in a constrained voice.

It was Madame Misri's turn now to weigh her words; and instead of replying to the question she said: "What would you do to punish this man?"

Thanks to his amazing self-control, Raymond choked down the exclamation of joy which rose to his lips. This woman who spoke to him of vengeance, and who seemed willing to sign a compact of hatred, was Flora Misri, so long the associate and confidante of M. de Combelaine. To ruin the count, Raymond felt certain this woman had only to lift her little finger. Was she loyal? Could he trust her? "I have but one thought madame," he said, slowly. "I impatiently look forward to the time when I may punish this man."

The brougham had just reached the Arc de Triomphe de l'Etoile, that is to say, the summit of the rising ground, and the coachman drove at a spanking pace down the Avenue de la Reine-Hortense. Noticing this Madame Misri hastily lowered the front window of the carriage. "Turn round," she said to her coachman. "Take the Avenue de l'Impératrice, and walk your horses."

Then turning to Raymond she continued: "You distrust me, Monsieur Delorge? I can see that very plainly. Do not deny it. I am thoroughly well informed. You distrust me because you know that for twenty years I have been the Count de Combelaine's friend."

Raymond did not speak.

"Know, then," she continued, "that I now hate this man more than you do."

"Madame!"

"Yes; I mean what I say; for I have every reason to hate him. He has deceived me. He has trifled with me. You know his past—you know his relations with me. I was a mere child when I first knew him. He led a most miserable existence. He was flouted by all, respected by none. He lived on his wits, by his sword, and by the gaming-table. But he pleased me. His cynicism frightened me. His impudence dazzled me. I worshipped his very vices. In a short time I became his slave. I thought and felt only as he wished me to think and feel. What days those were! One by one his resources became exhausted, and it was on me that he then depended for his cigars and coffee, and the money he gambled with. If I could not supply his needs he beat me. Why did I remain with him? I did not love him? I hated him; still I stayed."

Was it to give Raymond more confidence that Madame Misri raised the veil from her indignation? "She is sincere," said Raymond to himself.

Meanwhile she continued: "Then came the *coup d'état*, and all at once Combelaïne became quite an important person. How was it that he did not break with me? I fancied it was because he was really attached to me—fool that I was! But he had simply decided that it was his interest not to separate. He has a very long head. He thought this prosperity of his was a fleeting thing, that the day might come when Flora would be again useful to him. He was never able to put any money by. With imperial revenues at his control, he was always embarrassed and always in debt. Millions on millions have passed through his hands, and been lavished on women, play and horses. His friends all say he will end in an alms-house; but I have always thought he would end in the assize court, knowing that when he needs money he will procure it at any cost, and that he hates those who are better off than himself."

Raymond was more and more impressed by this woman's sincerity, but he was anxious to know the cause of her hatred.

"At that time," she said, "I did my best to keep him within bounds. But he would not listen; he simply said, 'Pshaw! While I am ruining myself just you get rich; and when you are a millionaire I will marry you.' He said that so many times that finally the idea did not leave my brain: the thought of being Madame la Comtesse, after being—what I have been—was naturally very agreeable to me. So I began to save, and I was actually miserly. My only happiness was to look at Combelaïne, and say to myself: 'Go on—spend—throw your money to the dogs. My store is growing, and the day is not far off when you will implore me on bended knees to be your wife.'"

One by one all Raymond's doubts had vanished. No art was capable of feigning such anger as Madame Misri's. "Two years elapsed, Monsieur Delorge," she continued, "before I found myself justified in my anticipations. I was right though, for one day Combelaïne had spent his last farthing, and then he thought of me. I saw him come in. His face was very pale and his eyes bloodshot, which with him was a sign of very great emotion. 'You are rich, Flora?' he said. 'I have a million,' I answered. He walked up and down the room several times, and then he came towards me and said: 'Look here—I am drowning—give me half of what you have; it will save me.' I looked him full in the face, and I replied, 'As soon as we are married all I have will be yours.' He jumped three feet. 'You are not in earnest?' he asked. 'Indeed I am.' 'Do you expect me to marry you?' 'Most assuredly.' But here let me tell you, Monsieur Delorge, that in

reality I had no such anticipations. I felt that when my gun was ready it would miss fire. And I was right. 'A woman like you!' he cried. 'What sort of a man are you?' said I. Once upon a time if I had said such a thing, the count would have beaten me black and blue. But as I had money he swallowed his rage. 'Ah! my poor girl,' he went on to say, 'to marry you would be to lead you a most dreadful life.' 'And why?' I asked. 'Because each day would usher in new mortifications. If you were Madame la Comtesse de Combelaïne you would be none the less Flora Misri, and to Flora Misri all doors would be closed.' I had foreseen all these objections. 'My dear,' I said, 'I shall never ask for what is impossible. What you have done for yourself is all I wish you to do for me. You know very well that you have been despised, loathed and condemned, but did anybody tell you so? By no means. You never missed your man on the duelling ground—everybody knew that, and you were treated civilly. For the same reasons folks will treat your wife in the same way, and whomsoever she may be she will be received!' On hearing this, he asked, 'Is that all you have to say?' 'Yes, all. No marriage, no money.' He left the house, calm, to all appearance, but I knew very well that he wanted to strangle me.

"I was beginning to feel a little uneasy at the result of this affair, when his confidential servant came and asked to see me. This fellow Leonard, who has not his equal for shrewdness, had listened at the door and heard the whole conversation. 'Bravo, little one!' he said to me. 'You have netted your prey. Tie the knot while you can, and he is yours.' I knew what Leonard wanted, and so I said to him: 'There will be ten thousand francs for you on the day I become the Countess de Combelaïne.' 'Good!' he cried. 'Count on me, and get your money ready.' All that week Victor—Victor is De Combelaïne, you know—came to see me every evening; and, managed by me and Leonard, he got used to the idea. 'I don't say no,' he remarked at last, 'only you understand that, so far as the public goes, your money ought to be settled on yourself, for I don't propose to pay my creditors with your money.' I was getting on. To put Victor in a good humour I lent him twenty thousand francs. I ordered my wedding outfit, but it was thrown away. One morning I received an envelope containing twenty thousand francs and a note from Victor, in which he said that, as fortune was smiling once more upon him, he should prefer to remain a bachelor. This was at the time of the Mexican war. That same evening I saw Leonard, who exclaimed: 'We are done for, this time. My master has just made an enormous fortune in speculation. His creditors offer him boundless credit. Your day is only put off.' I was raving, as you may believe, and I really fancied I should have a brain fever. Nevertheless, I thought with Leonard that my day would come at last. I determined to double my fortune while Victor was losing his, and I had little difficulty in doing so, through my friends Contanceau, the banker, and Verdale, the great architect. One of them speculated for me at the Bourse, and the other in land."

Raymond had at first objected to the obscurity; but he now rejoiced at it, for he feared to show the disgust on his countenance, which was inspired by this loathsome story. He could not conceal his anger at the thought that this wretch, Combelaïne, had dared to aspire to the hand of Simone, that high-born maiden. Meanwhile the vehicle had reached the end of the Avenue de l'Impératrice and the coachman, not receiving any orders, turned again; but Madame Misri did not notice it.

With increasing vehemence she began to speak again. "As regards money, the first hundred thousand francs are those that are difficult to

accumulate ; and to make a million afterwards is a very simple thing. In less than eighteen months I have done it. One single operation in some houses near the Théâtre Français brought me in four hundred thousand francs. Verdale is a good old soul, and always ready to oblige his friends. In short, I was in the enjoyment of an immense income, when one evening in walked Victor—pale, thin, and harrassed. ‘Not a farthing,’ he said, as he fell into a chair. ‘Not a farthing, and no credit either.’ The fellow had not been near me for more than a year, but Leonard had kept me informed of everything he did. I knew that his immense fortune had again melted in his hands like so much snow, and that he had resumed his old life of shifts and expedients. Lawyers were at his heels—his house was seized, and all his pictures had been sold one after the other. If he retained any vestiges of his past splendour, he owed them to Leonard, who held the horses and carriages in his own name, and to me, who, from time to time had secretly advanced a hundred louis or so, because it did not suit my views that he should fall too low. Seeing him under my roof again, I was, I must admit, considerably disturbed. But, during the two years of his neglect, I had had time to prepare my little revenge, and so with my most lofty air I said: ‘You are ruined, then! You had better blame those friends of yours who gave you the eight hundred thousand francs which induced you to remain a bachelor!’ If a pitcher of cold water had been poured down his back, he could not have made a worse face. ‘And you desert me, too,’ he said, dismally. ‘In all my troubles I thought you, at least, would stick to me.’ He then began to excuse and accuse himself. He said he had behaved like a great rascal, but he loved me, and should always do so. I laughed, and made him a courtesy. ‘Too late, my dear sir!’ I cried.

“He looked utterly confounded, while I went on to say that I had reflected, that I liked my independence, that if I should take it into my head to marry, there were four or five men far better off than he who would give me their names ; that my money ought to buy me the title of a duchess, for, thanks to my common sense, I now possessed not one million, but two. On hearing this, he glanced at me in such a way that I was half tempted to ring the bell for my servants to come to my assistance. ‘And you don’t love me,’ he repeated, ‘you don’t love me?’ I did not answer, not that I wished to discourage him entirely, but I thought it was best not to go too fast.

“He knew very well that I had not said all I had to say, and with his own peculiar art he tried to reconquer me. He knows women perfectly well. No honest man would know how to play the comedy he played for a month. I knew he was lying, and yet there were moments when I allowed myself to believe him. At last I yielded to his entreaties, and the day of our marriage was fixed. The press announced, and at his request, you understand, that the Count de Combelaïne was about to marry Madame Flora Misri. Then, in order that he might return to his club, I gave him enough to pay his debts of honour (sixty thousand francs), and I distributed more than that amount among his creditors. All was so well arranged that I was not at all disturbed when, in November, Victor asked me to postpone our marriage until he could succeed in inducing a certain great lady to be present at it. In December he, with Verdale and Maumussy, went off on a journey, to which I did not make the slightest objection. There was a bandage over my eyes, but one morning I received an anonymous letter to this effect:—‘You are very simple, little Flora. Aided by the money you gave him, Combelaïne is paying his addresses to a lady whom he wishes to

marry. He will do this before another month is over. He will marry an heiress as young as you are old, as noble as you are the contrary, adorably pretty, and four times as rich as yourself. This young lady's name is Simone de Maillefert."

Even now, after the lapse of weeks, Madame Misri's voice broke, as she spoke of this letter. "My first idea," she continued, "was that a practical joke had been played upon me. How was it possible for me to believe that a great family would consent to give their heiress to a man like Combelaïne, ruined both in honour and pocket—and utterly used up in short. Finally, doubts began to creep in. I thought of Victor's wonderful skill in transforming himself. I reflected that he was keen and clever to a degree—that even his enemies admitted this. I remembered the journey which he and his friends had taken together, when they had spent several days at the Château de Maillefert. I determined to know the truth, and that night, when I was alone with Victor, I suddenly asked, in an indifferent tone:

"Who is Mademoiselle de Maillefert?"

"I must admit that I never saw a person with such self-command as that man. When his interests are at stake, I really believe that you might put a red-hot iron on the back of his neck and he would not start, but continue to smile. However, he may deceive others, but he can't hoodwink me. I know when he is moved. His moustache quivers, and his ears, which are generally red, turn white. I detected both these symptoms, though he answered me very quietly: 'Mademoiselle de Maillefert is the heiress of the family of that name.' I have not the same gift as Victor, and I had great difficulty in concealing my emotion.

"Do you know this young lady?" I asked. "I have seen her," he said. "Is she pretty?" I asked again. "Well enough," he retorted. "And rich?" I asked. "Passably so. She has an elder brother, and as you know, in most families of importance, the elder son, despite the law, is apt to have the lion's share." Then I inquired: "Do you know this family?" "To which he answered: 'Not at all.' This last falsehood settled the matter. It was now perfectly clear that my dear Victor was doing his very best to betray me, and that if I were not on my guard, he would again escape me, and I should find myself foiled and deserted. 'Not if I know myself,' I thought."

For some moments Raymond had eagerly waited for a chance to ask a question, and when Flora Misri stopped to draw breath, he laid his hand on her arm. "One word, madame. Have you endeavoured to discover the origin of this anonymous letter?"

"Do you take me for an idiot?"

"And what have you found out?"

"Nothing at all. Combelaïne has so many enemies, you know."

"But, you have kept it?"

"Of course."

"Will you allow me to examine it?"

"Most certainly. To-night, if you choose."

VII.

THE two occupants of the brougham were so absorbed that they did not notice the flight of time. But the coachman on his box did not like the coolness of the evening air, and so he determined to remind his mistress of the hour. He stopped his horse, and opening the front window, without

any ceremony, "Are we never going home?" he asked, in a tone that merited immediate dismissal.

"Not yet," answered Madame Misri; "drive on!"

"Where?"

"Wherever you choose. Along the outer boulevard."

The coachman thereupon vented his ill-humour on the poor horses.

"Until I received that anonymous letter," resumed Madame Misri, "I was perfectly frank with Victor, like the simpleton I am. I promised myself, if he shared his name with me, to divide my money loyally with him, and I felt certain that would delight his soul. But I now made up my mind that if I married him he should never have a farthing! As you may imagine, the desire for revenge made me all the more eager to succeed. I determined to find out something from Verdale and Maumussy, but I threw away my time. The one laughed at me, and the other scoffed. I saw they were in the plot, and that if I insisted, they would tell Combelaïne, who had no idea that I knew anything. I then went to Coutanceau, whom you probably know—the old banker, who is apparently on good terms with Combelaïne, but who, I found, hates him heartily. Coutanceau promised to find out the truth for me. While I was waiting I wrote out a full account of Combelaïne's life. I had this paper copied by a friend, and I sent the pleasing letter to the Duchess de Maillefert, adding at the bottom, 'For further information, apply to Madame Flora Misri, such a street, and such a number.'"

"Good heavens!" thought Raymond, "why did I not come across you the day after my arrival in Paris!"

But Flora allowed him little time for reflection, and it was necessary he should give all his attention to her, for the coachman was driving fast, and many of her words were lost in the rattle of the wheels. "I suppose you wonder why Leonard told me nothing of all this. I confess that at first I was greatly astonished; but, after all, I thought that as he had once betrayed his master to me, he might now betray me to his master? But I did him an injustice, for at my first words he was perfectly aghast. For the first time in his life Combelaïne had kept a secret from his valet. 'Now, then,' exclaimed Leonard, 'we will just prevent this marriage from taking place! Knowing what we know, we shall be great fools if we don't. You work your own way, and I'll go mine.'

"I told him what I had done already. I told him of the letter I had written to the Duchess de Maillefert, whereat he was greatly pleased, and said I had done a good day's work.

"For the next three days I hardly dared put my nose out-of-doors. Each time the bell rang I thought it must be the duchess. But she did not come. I wondered if my revelations had missed their mark, and if her confidence in Combelaïne was unshaken. I feared that my letter had been intercepted. Victor is very cunning, and I thought it quite possible that he had spies at the Maillefert mansion, who would see that nothing reached the duchess without his inspection. He was quite capable of buying the *concierge*, the valets and the maids. I was hesitating as to what step to take next, when Coutanceau called on me one morning. 'I am worn out,' he said, 'for I have been running about for five days playing the detective for your benefit.' 'Have you found out anything?' I asked. 'To be sure I have, and plenty, too,' he replied. 'I dare say, Monsieur Delorge, that you have heard a great many hard things said of Monsieur Coutanceau. He is called a usurer, a skinflint, a robber of the poor, &c. I dare say all this may be

true, but at all events he is the best of the whole band—he is always ready to do a kindness—I mean when it costs him nothing.’ So he began: ‘You have been rightly informed—Combelaïne is to be married almost immediately.’ ‘Not so,’ I answered. ‘He won’t be married without the consent of Madame Flora Misri, and she won’t give it.’ ‘He will marry without it, my child,’ said Coutanceau. ‘Do you think so?’ I rejoined. ‘Do you think if the duchess learns what sort of son-in-law she will have in Combelaïne she will agree to accept him?’ ‘Certainly I do,’ replied Coutanceau. ‘You mean that she will not believe me?’ I retorted. ‘But I can support every statement I made with irrefutable proofs—proofs which have been gathering up for years, and which I have guarded as carefully as my bonds and mortgages. I have papers which would send Combelaïne to the galleys to-morrow.’ Coutanceau shrugged his shoulders. ‘Send him there then, my dear,’ he said; ‘for that is the only way I can see of preventing his marriage!’

“I burst out at this. ‘I mean what I say,’ he replied; ‘the Mailleferts and your Victor are playing a deep game, and they quite agree.’ ‘You are sure of what you say?’ I asked. ‘Certainly,’ he resumed, ‘and I have obtained my information from the young duke himself. You will tell me that I don’t know him; that’s true. I have not spoken to him four times in my life, but I know a woman who has cost him a fortune, and he promised to give her a carriage and pair the day after his sister became the Countess de Combelaïne. As to his creditors, when they beset him for money, he invariably replies that he will pay them when his sister is married. What is to be concluded from this? Simply that the illustrious De Maillefert family, instead of ruining themselves to give the young lady a dowry, expect a fortune from the son-in-law. Coutanceau’s story struck me as almost incredible—I really thought he was laughing at me. ‘Combelaïne with a fortune!’ I cried. ‘Do you tell me such a thing as that! If he needed ten thousand francs to keep his head on his shoulders he wouldn’t know where to get them unless he stole them.’ Thereupon Coutanceau began to whistle, and said, ‘I happen to know that your Combelaïne has opened an account with Verdale. Not longer ago than yesterday I saw the cashier give him thirty-five thousand francs against his simple receipt.’”

Never in his life had Raymond so exerted every faculty of his mind. He was eager to take advantage of this most unexpected chance that had presented itself, and lost all knowledge of time and place. Madame Misri, on her side, was equally oblivious, and continued her lengthy narration:

“I distrusted every one except Coutanceau,” she said. “I knew that he hated Combelaïne, Verdale, and Maumussy. You know Coutanceau staked every farthing he had in the world at the time of the *coup d’état*, and he was called the 2nd December usurer. But this name was really most unjust, for he stipulated for no interest. He simply asked that some position of importance should be given him in case of success. This promise was made. He was told that he could have anything he asked for. But when the time came, Coutanceau’s pretensions were ridiculed. They said he was too old, that his education was inferior, that he lacked prestige, and had no courtliness of manner. The end of it all was that he got no appointment, which enraged him so much that I have heard him say twenty times that he would give all he owned to demolish the Empire he had helped to build. You can readily judge, Monsieur Delorge, that I was glad I could depend on Coutanceau, now that I had determined to punish Combelaïne. So I said to him: ‘Pray tell me more, and don’t keep me in suspense any longer,’ ‘I understand

little one!' he answered; you will just go and repeat everything to Combelaïne.' 'I! Do you think I would denounce you?' I cried. 'I hate him! I loathe him!' Coutanceau looked at me. 'Very well,' he said, 'then I will tell you a little story:

"Once upon a time a beautiful young lady lived in Anjou. She was pretty and good, and lived all alone in a great château. Her name was Simone. This young lady was as rich as the defunct Marquis of Carabass. All the country round about belonged to her. Her property was worth millions, and she took care of her land herself, just like any good old farmer. But the young lady's mother and brother ate up their own fortune, and then they wanted hers. They tried every way to dispossess her, but all in vain, and then they got very angry. However, all at once they had an idea, and that was, to marry Simone to a man who would agree to divide the cake with them—that is to say, the dowry. They were looking about for some such amiable and accommodating youth, when the Duchess de Maumussy proposed the Count de Combelaïne. At a sign from the duchess, Victor left for Anjou with Maumussy and Baron Verdale. He saw these people, and in three days all was settled. Promises were exchanged, and now nothing was wanting but the girl's consent, which was not a very easy thing to procure, as she had a lover whom she wished to marry; but the Duchess de Maumussy was rich in expedients. I don't know exactly what she said or did. I do know, however, that at the end of the year Mademoiselle Simone left her château and came to her mother's house in Paris, and also that everything is now arranged.'"

Innumerable questions surged to Raymond's lips, but Madame Misri would not allow him to speak. "Wait until I have finished!" she cried, in a hoarse voice. "Wait!" And at the memory of all her wrongs, the blood rushed to her head, and the veins in her throat swelled with rage.

"Old Coutanceau," she continued, "had told me all he knew. For an hour I turned him round as I might turn an old glove, and I got nothing more—not one solitary detail—so I dismissed him. I was eager to be alone, so that I might give way to my rage. I am no fool, you understand, and I knew very well that I, Flora Misri, thirty-five years old, could hardly stand against the attractions of a girl of twenty. If she had only been poor! but no, she was rich—so rich that I, with my two millions, was a beggar beside her. Yes, it was clear that I was betrayed. I knew that all hope of aid from the Mailleferts was gone, and I saw that I had only myself to rely upon. I felt, too, that there was no time to waste. So I determined to attack Combelaïne at once. That very evening he appeared about ten o'clock, smoking his cigar, smiling, and as insolent as usual. I had thought over what I should say, but the sight of him made me forget all my fine phrases. I grew very angry, and went straight towards him. 'Coward!' I cried. 'Tell me if it is true that you are going to be married!' If you think he was disconcerted, you are greatly mistaken. He answered very coldly: 'I came to-night to announce my marriage to you.' 'Indeed!' I cried; 'this marriage will never take place.' 'And why, pray?' he asked. 'Because I will not allow it!'"

Madame Misri's voice was raised to such a pitch by this time that the curiosity of the coachman was evidently aroused, and Raymond saw him lean towards the window, as if to see what was going on inside the carriage.

"Victor and I," said Madame Misri, "had certainly had several disputes during the twenty years we had known each other, but never such an one as that evening. 'You say I shall not marry Mademoiselle Simone?' he asked.

'You shall not,' I replied. 'And why, if you please?' he asked again. 'Because you belong to me. Because I, by the sacrifice of my youth, purchased the right to become your wife; because I have your word; because I am tired of being fooled, and finally because I could never endure——' 'Good heavens!' sneered Combelaïne; 'do you mean that you are jealous?' 'And why should I not be?' I answered. His face softened. 'You are foolish,' he answered, 'very foolish. Let me tell you that I candidly prefer you, who have been the sunshine of my life, always gay and cheerful, to that lachrymose virgin named Simone de Maillefert. Does she understand me? Do we even speak the same language? This marriage is a sacrifice I make for projects of future ambition and happiness. We are growing old, my poor Flora—we must win comforts for our declining years. Millions are lying in my path, which only need my stooping to pick them up. Ah! if I could only have the money without the woman. But this doesn't seem to be the custom. Let us swallow this bitter pill, Flora; but no jealousy, for that would be the height of absurdity. You don't know this girl. She won't live a year. By that time I shall be free, with an enormous fortune, and a far steadier position than now. Then I will return to you, and bring you, not the title of countess, but that of duchess. Our two fortunes united will enable us to have one of the finest establishments in Paris—and all the world will be at our feet. It is true I do belong to you, but when such great interests are involved, you might lend me for a few weeks to a poor girl to gratify her sick fancy.'

"This is what Victor said to me, not perhaps as I have repeated it, but at greater length, gently and tenderly, with loving voice and eyes. 'I have only four words to say to all this,' I answered, 'and they are, "No, I will not." 'You regard me then, it seems, as your absolute property,' he said, with raised eyebrows. 'Yes,' I cried; and then, utterly distracted, I began to shower insults and epithets upon him. I told him what I knew, and what I suspected of his various infamies. He waited until I had finished, and then said: 'It seems to me that you are presenting your bill.' 'Yes,' I rejoined, 'and I intend to be paid.' He shrugged his shoulders. 'I am tired out with all this nonsense,' he said, 'and I certainly shall not yield to your caprices.' 'Take care, Victor,' I said, 'you forget something!' I went to the chimneypiece, where I could reach the bell before I spoke again. 'What do I forget?' he asked. 'The papers,' I replied. His face became very pale, but he said quietly: 'What papers?'

"I was about to play my last card. 'You know as well as I do,' I replied. 'A man who for twenty years has meddled in every political intrigue is often compelled to keep most dangerous and compromising papers. You were too wise to keep them in your own rooms, where they might be discovered in your absence, if your house was searched, as Father Coutanceau's was, so you intrusted me with all those papers which you regarded as particularly dangerous. You said to me, "Preserve them carefully." So I did; but as I like to know the value of what I have under my charge, I read them.' He had the greatest difficulty in restraining himself. 'Yes, I read them,' I repeated. 'I am stupid, I know, but I can read.' 'And if I asked you to return these papers?' he asked. 'I should say that I should give them to my husband.' 'So that if I marry Mademoiselle Simone——' 'I should utilize them.' 'You!' he exclaimed. 'I took the bell-rope in my hand. 'Yes, I,' I answered. 'And if you wish to know what I will do, I will tell you. I will classify and arrange them. Some I shall send to one person, others to another, and some to the emperor. One I shall give to my sister,

and others to Madame Delorge. In reference to the last ones, from Berlin, I shall decide later on.' I thought he would turn on me and choke me, but I was much mistaken. He took up his hat, and opening the door, he said: 'You ought to understand that after this I shall never willingly look on your face again. You think you will betray me. We shall see about that.' And then he went away."

Madame Flora laughed a nervous laugh, such as a lunatic might have given vent to, and then she leant towards Raymond. "Well," she asked, "what have you to say now?"

Raymond literally could not speak; he was dazzled by the vista which this woman's bitter desire for vengeance opened before him, and he trembled lest some unwary word of his should recall her to prudence.

"You are astonished at Victor," she said. "What would you be if you knew the contents of the papers in my possession, and where they might place him if I chose to make them known? But he knew me to be as weak as a child, so far as he was concerned, as cowed as a dog that has been whipped and then returns to kiss its master's hand. Many a time I had been tempted to break my chains and fly. Many a time I had threatened to avenge myself for all he had made me suffer. All to no purpose, however, and he unquestionably said to himself when he left me, 'It will be just as it has always been—Flora will never do what she says she will.' But I said to myself, 'Hold your head up in the air, and look as contemptuous as you please. Before the end of the week, not having any letter from me, you will begin to feel uneasy.'"

"I felt it was now safe to rest on my laurels, certain that Victor would go no further without another explanation with me. Then, if he persisted, it would be time to act. But so that I might not be taken by surprise, and in order to keep myself informed of Combelaïne's daily acts, I sent for Leonard, who appeared with a rather crestfallen air. 'We have been fooled, madame,' he said, 'my master is certainly going to marry the heiress. 'What!' said I, in spite of us, and in spite of the arms we hold?' 'We cannot prevent it. If the affair could have been broken off the Mailleferts would do so,' he replied. 'What, the people who are in league with him?' I asked. 'They may have been,' said Leonard. 'But they have quarreled now, although they see each other still, visit and go out together; however, there is no love—no liking between them. I know what I say. Only the day before yesterday the young duke appeared at the door and said he must see my master at once. I went to tell my master, who said: 'The deuce take the fool—let him in though!' I went out, but I took good care not to go far—and I listened with all my ears. The two then began to talk, both at once, and such things I never heard gentlemen say to each other—no two rag-pickers could have said worse. Master Philippe asked for some money, which he said my master had stolen—enormous sums in fact! My master said, "So much the worse for you, then! Apply to the courts for redress."

"I hardly knew, Monsieur Delorge, what to make of the account Leonard gave me—but he declared it was true. 'And yet the marriage will not be broken off?' I asked. 'It is more decided on than ever,' he replied. 'But that is non-sense,' I rejoined. Leonard shrugged his shoulders. 'I confess,' he answered, 'that I can't make it out. There is, of course, some devilry of my master's underneath it all. But what? I have worried myself into fiddle-sticks thinking, and now I give it up.'"

"The situation became more and more complicated; so that I did not know what to think. I even began to doubt Leonard, and watched him

carefully, wondering if he were not bought over by Victor. 'Perhaps,' I said, at last; 'perhaps the young lady loves some one else!' On hearing this Leonard uttered an exclamation, and went on to say that the poor young lady did love some one. He told me that everyone knew it—and knew you to be the person; and that you would have become her husband if Victor had not been brought forward by Madame de Maumussy. I was struck by this strange fatality, for I at once remembered your father's name, and said to myself: 'That's a man who won't easily let Combeldaine tread on him.'

Did Madame Misri fancy that it was necessary to add coals to the fire of Raymond's burning hatred before she laid a sure plan of revenge before him? She knew nothing of his resolutions and his desperation when she asked him to enter her brougham; and he had sat by her side, apparently calm and undisturbed by what she had said, though it was strongly calculated to arouse his anger. One great consideration had entailed this reserve and caution upon him. Although he had entire faith in the present sincerity of Madame Misri, he distrusted her in regard to the future. Without having had much experience of passion, he was clever enough to see that in spite of her vehement protestations of hate, Madame Misri still loved the Count de Combeldaine more than ever. She had thrown off her chains, but she might slip them on again and resume her old habits of blind submission. A visit from him, a word, or even a look might prove sufficient. It was, therefore, all the more necessary that he should improve the present occasion and obtain these papers.

"Well?" he said, interrogatively.

"There ended Leonard's information," Flora replied. "But we agreed to remain allies, both pursuing the same end—I openly, and he in secret. And I awaited events, with information from Coutanceau sometimes, and sometimes from Leonard. According to Coutanceau all hope was lost, and I ought to utilize my weapons immediately. According to Leonard, on the contrary, I ought to wait, as he was convinced that Victor and the duke would end their dispute by a duel. Unfortunately, however, things looked to me as if Coutanceau were right. I heard of Combeldaine's marriage on all sides. Everybody was amazed, but still no doubts were expressed. In this extremity, I determined to influence Victor through one of his old friends. Among his papers, I had found those which would frightfully compromise some of the highest persons in the land, and the Duke de Maumussy especially. I addressed him first. After clearly explaining the position of affairs—although he probably knew it as well as I did—I said: 'I cannot attack Victor without attacking you at the same time. I regret this, but it cannot be helped. Use your influence, therefore, not to make him marry me—I do not exact that—but to break off this marriage, which I am resolved to prevent at any cost.' I expected to see Maumussy arrive out of breath, or, at all events, I looked for an immediate answer. Not at all. I then wrote in succession to Verdale and the Princess d'Eljensen. Not a word.

"They laughed at my anger. They mocked at my threats. This was so evident, that I should have felt certain I had over-estimated the importance of my papers if Coutanceau had not examined them and taken advantage of the opportunity to carry away those which concerned himself. He regarded this silence as most extraordinary, and said that it concealed some deep plot. 'Take care!' he said to me over and over again. 'Take care!' And I, who knew better than he did what Victor is capable of, I shuddered with fear. I fancied that everything I ate had a strange taste. I hardly dared

leave the house, and at night time I barricaded my door as if I feared attack. Ah! those horrible papers. Twenty times I put them into envelopes and directed them—twenty times I was horrified at what I had done, and took them out, saying: ‘I cannot—no, I cannot.’ Then, Monsieur Delorge, do you know what I did? Poor silly fool that I am! I wrote to Victor and asked to see him, saying that our quarrel had risen from a misunderstanding, which could be easily explained.”

If Madame Misri thought she should astonish Raymond by this confession she was mistaken, for he had foreseen it, and now congratulated himself on his penetration.

“Yes, I did just that,” she resumed, “and in an agony of suspense I waited, but not for long. For that very evening Victor returned my letter unopened. On the outside was written with a red pencil: ‘Enough of this, or I shall be obliged to ask the prefect of police to relieve me from threats and demands which are equally ridiculous.’ He threatened me with the police! He! What a bitter sarcasm; And I hesitated to expose him! I cried. But I hesitate still, Monsieur Delorge, and this is why you met me to-night at the gate of the Count de Combelaïne’s house, for I wished to offer him one last chance of safety—and you heard the answer. He shut his door on me, this man who owes me everything; who has lived at my expense; who has robbed me and ruined me; who owes me the very money which he gives to these footmen who insulted me. And Leonard is no longer there.”

“Why, without letting me know, has he suddenly left the count, whom he served for so many years, and who, as he told me but twenty-four hours ago, owes him more than twenty thousand francs? And who is this Englishman who has offered him such fabulous wages?”

Madame Misri paused to draw breath; and then, with convulsive violence, she exclaimed: “My cup is full; his door is shut upon me, and I was asking myself how my vengeance would be swiftest and surest when I saw and recognized you. I have told you all. I am but a woman and do not know how to use the weapons I hold in my hand—they are too heavy for me, possibly. Will you avenge me and yourself at the same time? Are you ready to swear that you will do your best to crush this man?”

Never had Raymond found so much difficulty in retaining his self-control. “Do you mean to say that you will give me these papers?” he asked.

“I will give them to you.”

“When?”

Imperceptible as was Flora’s indecision, it did not escape Raymond’s observation. “To-morrow,” she answered; “To-morrow morning.”

“And why not to-night?”

“To-night?”

“Yes, this very moment. Bid your coachman drive home—take me to your rooms—give me the papers. I will examine them to-night, and to-morrow I will open fire.”

A sudden shock interrupted him. The brougham had drawn up in the centre of the Avenue d’Eylau, and the coachman, as before, dropped the glass. “Madame!” he said, anxiously; “madame!”

She, with her thoughts far away, answered him with an impatient command to drive on.

“Very well, madame,” he replied; “But I think you ought to know that we are followed.”

She started, and instinctively grasped Raymond’s arm. “Is it possible?” she exclaimed.

"Yes ; I am as sure of it as I am of my life," said the coachman. "Haven't you noticed the queer turns I have made? Well, it was because I wished to find out the truth. I suspected it in the Champs Elysées. Seeing a carriage going in the same direction, and keeping close to us, turn as I turned, to the right, or to the left, I said to myself, 'Somebody is watching madame! Then I drove on, sometimes at a gallop, and sometimes at a walk; the carriage was behind, and now, while I am standing still, that same carriage isn't a hundred feet away.'"

The darkness was too great for the coachman to see the profound effect produced by his report. But while he spoke, Flora clung to Raymond, trembling like a leaf. "Do you hear?" she gasped.

"Perfectly."

"It is Combelaïne who is following us."

"Either Combelaïne or some one else."

"No—it is he—I know his ways, and the traitor he is! While I was talking with his servant he was hidden behind the curtains. He saw us speak to each other, and then enter my brougham. He asked who you were, and when he was told he jumped into a carriage and started in pursuit."

Raymond felt that victory was escaping his grasp—the victory which he had regarded for the last hour as certain and decisive; for he saw that Flora was frightened at her own audacity, and that nervous prostration had now succeeded her previous excitement.

"Perhaps you are right," he said, "but what of it?"

"What of it! Don't you see that if Combelaïne is following us, it is because he is shrewd enough to divine what we mean to do. If he is watching us, it is because he guesses that I have told you everything, offered you the papers, and that we have signed a treaty of revenge."

Raymond did not place complete reliance on the coachman's statement, as he thought it quite possible that the man had invented the tale in his desire to be ordered "home." So he turned to the driver: "Where is the carriage which you say is following us!"

The coachman straightened himself up so as to see the better. "It is just in the same place," he replied, "near a café. The light from the windows is on it now, sir. If you will look out at the back you will see it yourself."

Raymond did so, and about a hundred feet in the rear he distinguished a carriage standing motionless. But what did that prove?

"My good fellow," he said to Madame Misri's servant, "it is not always well to trust to appearances. Drive on while I watch, and take sharp turns and go round enough corners to make the thing certain."

"Very well, sir," and the coachman at once touched up his horse.

"What do you think?" asked Flora, eagerly.

"I think that your man is right. The carriage follows us all the time, turning just as we turn, and carefully keeping the same distance behind us."

When Raymond was perfectly certain, he told the coachman to draw up. "I believe," he said to Flora, "that Combelaïne is in that carriage. I mean to make sure of it."

"What do you intend to do?"

"I intend to get out, and go and ask the occupant of the vehicle, no matter whom he may be, by what right he follows us."

He opened the door as he spoke, but Madame Misri grasped him by the arm. "You must not do that," she cried; "I cannot stay here alone. I am afraid. Besides, if it is Victor in the carriage, what will happen?"

Was it for Raymond that she feared, or for De Combelaine? It was hard to decide. At all events, Delorge began to lose his temper.

"What do you want then?" he said, with an oath he was unable to restrain. "Have you any idea?"

"Yes."

"What is it, then?"

"It is this. My horse is tired, I know, but he is a splendid animal, and will do what we want. Let us drive very fast and straight on, keeping on a wide road. The other carriage won't follow us long."

"And after that?"

"After that we will drive back, and I will go home, or spend the night with one of my friends."

This plan offered Raymond the advantage of not leaving Madame Misri, and the prospect of going home with her and getting the papers. "That is a good idea!" he said; and addressing the coachman: "You must get away from that carriage. Take the Avenue de la Grande Armée, then the Avenue de Neuilly, and finally the road to Saint Germain."

"But the horse is tired."

"Never mind! it must be done," said his mistress.

The coachman shrugged his shoulders. "What queer fancy is this!" he muttered, as he whipped up his horse.

"Our spies will have their trouble for nothing," said Raymond.

Madame Misri made no remark. No doubt she was already repenting of what she had done, and would have gladly recalled her confidence could she have done so. Was this fear of Combelaine, or regret at having compromised him? It was difficult to decide. The relations of people like Madame Misri and De Combelaine are not easy to analyze. Passion is often complicated by circumstances which are mysterious and not to be avowed. Their connection was founded on shameful ties, which are really harder to break than those of social force.

"We are not gaining ground!" she murmured.

Raymond looked out; it was true, the other lanterns were at the same distance.

Tears came to Flora's eyes. "Now," she sobbed, at if in answer to the objections in her own mind—"now I understand the silence and security of the count and his friends. They are very powerful, you see, very powerful. They have friends everywhere, and at the prefecture of police more than anywhere else. Since the day I first threatened them, I have been surrounded by spies. I have suspected every servant in my house. Who can say that this very man, my coachman, is not in their employment, and not paid to watch me; and Leonard, he has probably betrayed me. I dare say, Coutanceau himself ridicules me!" And as she spoke she tore her hair, "Now," she continued, "I understand Victor's obstinacy; he knows that if I hand you these papers he is lost, and he determined that you shall not have them. Fool that I have been! Why did I threaten him? Why did I not strike first?"

Raymond saw that this inconsequent, capricious creature was escaping him; but he had not lost all hope. He swore that he would have the papers that very night, even if he were compelled to resort to threats and violence. But he must first of all attend to that confounded carriage. "Stop," he cried; and as Madame Misri drew up, he sprang to the ground.

Madame Misri held him back. "What are you going to do?" she asked.

"To see if I can't make your horse go faster than your coachman does."

She dared not oppose him, and, in another minute, Raymond was on the box with the reins in his hand. "Don't be troubled," he called out to Flora, "it will be all right."

But he changed his route. Instead of going along the Avenue de Neuilly, he turned to the left into the Allée de Longchamps, which crosses the Bois de Boulogne diagonally. The other carriage did the same; but Madame Misri's equipage this time made a perceptible advance.

"Another half hour like this and the animal will be foundered," grumbled the coachman.

"We shan't want another half hour," said Raymond, as he extinguished the lamps of the brougham. "That will make it harder work for them," he muttered.

When he reached the spot where the Allée de la Reine Marguerite crosses the Allée de Longchamps, he turned a short corner into a path only intended for foot passengers; and, in spite of the absolute darkness, and at the risk of some great disaster, he kept the horse up to a gallop. At last, however, he suddenly stopped, and for five minutes listened, almost holding his breath. Not a sound, not a light.

"We are all right," cried Raymond, leaping to the ground and throwing open the door of the brougham. But no one answered him. He called again and felt in the darkness. The vehicle was empty. Madame Misri had disappeared.

VIII.

STUPEFIED and yet furious, Raymond could not at first believe in this strange disappearance, and he looked around him incredulously. The coachman laughed as if he would die, and as he rubbed down the quivering flanks of the poor animal with a woollen cloth, he said: "It isn't worth while to look, sir; madame is a good way off, if she is still running."

"Far off! You don't suppose she jumped out while I was driving at that furious rate?"

"Oh! no—madame is not so imprudent. But when you stopped the horse and listened a little while ago, I heard the door of the brougham open and shut softly, and I said to myself, 'what is going on now?'"

Raymond was sorely tempted to thrash the fellow—but what good would it do?

"That's enough," he interrupted. "But what on earth will Madame Misri do here at this hour, and in this darkness?"

"She will get back to town, sir, and very easily, for madame knows the Bois at all hours of the day and night, better than anyone in the world."

"Very well," said Raymond. "Then we will return also."

The coachman was only too glad to hear this decision. In another minute he had relighted the lamps, and as he shut the door, after Raymond had taken his seat, he asked, "Where shall I drive you, sir?"

"To the Boulevard des Italiens, at the corner of the Chaussée d'Antin."

They started, and, half stupefied by the motion of the carriage, Raymond apathetically reviewed the strange events of the evening. What a cruel disappointment! With his hand fairly on the very help he wanted, it had eluded his grasp, and probably for ever. Madame Flora's conduct irritated more than impressed him. In her low cunning he recognized the creature he had suspected—the low-born, debased woman, who was accustomed to

tremble and obey, incapable of open resistance, but always ready to betray and deceive. Where was she?

Once in her own apartments again, would she pack the papers all together and send them to Combelaïne, thus hoping to win his pardon?

"Miserable creature," thought Raymond—"creature without heart or brains!"

Although he had been exceedingly cautious, he had allowed her to see that, if he was ignorant of the precise nature of the intrigue which had placed Simone in the count's power, he at least knew that such an intrigue existed, and that he had made up his mind to battle with it. This was unfortunate, particularly as Raymond remembered Madame Misri's own words: "Such men as Combelaïne should never be threatened. Strike first." And now Combelaïne would be on his guard, and very possibly hurry on his marriage with Simone. In conclusion, Raymond saw that his meeting with Madame Misri had complicated the situation, and done him harm rather than good.

The carriage stopped on the boulevard, and when the coachman threw open the door with the announcement that they had arrived, Raymond gave him a louis, and, alighting from the brougham, stood for a moment uncertain what to do. He had no reason for going to one place rather than another, and he hesitated as to his course, when suddenly he thought of Madame Cornevin, who lived only a few steps off. "I will see her," he said.

Thus, suddenly, without reflection, a man often does a thing which is calculated to have the most serious influence on his life. For months Raymond had seen himself condemned to all sorts of painful dissimulation, in order to conceal the secret of his love for Simone from his mother and his friends, and yet he was now going to reveal it—or, rather, allow it to be divined by the subtle intuition of a woman. One fact dazed and blinded him. Madame Cornevin was Flora Misri's sister: and Madame Cornevin had once exercised a powerful influence over her sister, and had tried to use it when they were seeking Laurent Cornevin, after the death of General Delorge. To be sure, she had then failed. But Flora, at that time, was in all the brilliancy and insolence of youth, and at the age when vice has not lost its gilding. She was intoxicated with the sudden and prodigious fortune of the audacious adventurer with whom she had associated her life, while now——! Old and weary, having drained her cup of bitterness to the very dregs, she might be touched by considerations which then would not have moved her. Was it not possible that she would listen to her sister now, and gladly turn to her for comfort and advice? So Raymond simply intended to say to Madame Cornevin: "I know that Madame Flora Misri has important papers in her hands belonging to the Count de Combelaïne. If we could get hold of them, the wretch would be in our power. We should hold the proofs of his infamy, of his intrigues, and crimes. My father and your husband would be avenged. See your sister, and try to obtain them from her."

It was with these ideas that Raymond hurried along the Chaussée d'Antin. It was late; the shops were closed, the passers-by were few in number, and even the cafés were shutting. Raymond had eaten nothing since morning, but he was not aware of it. He was in that state when physical needs are dormant, and over-exerted nerves suffice for all. It was as he feared—Madame Cornevin had retired. "At least, I suppose so," said the concierge, "for all the workwomen went away very early to-night."

No matter! Raymond climbed the stairs, and rang a sharp, imperative peal at the bell. No answer—no one came.

But as he leaned against one of the windows on the landing, he saw a light which he knew must come from Madame Cornevin's bedroom. She was not asleep then. He rang a second time; then a third. He had about decided to abandon the attempt when he heard footsteps approaching. And from behind the door sounded a voice: "Who is there?"

"I—Raymond Delorge."

The door instantly opened. Madame Cornevin stood there with a candle in her hand. "What is the matter?" she exclaimed; "is there anyone ill at your house?"

"No one, thank Heaven, madame."

She was pale and agitated, as any man less absorbed than Raymond would have instantly seen. And with that volubility which one ordinarily adopts when embarrassed, she said: "Pray forgive me for keeping you waiting so long, but I sent my workwomen away at six, my servant and my daughters have retired, and I was just going to bed myself."

She was, however, dressed as carefully as when she received her customers during the day time.

"I must say a few words to you," interrupted Raymond.

"To-night."

"Yes—at once—respecting a very important matter."

Madame Cornevin's embarrassment became so great that he noticed it. "I fear that I am giving you a great deal of trouble," he said.

"No, indeed," she answered. "You give me no more trouble—disturb me no more when you come here than Jean and Léon would. Come in—come in!"

He followed her; but instead of showing him, as usual, into her own parlour, she took him into the work-room. Placing her candle on the table, she sank on to a chair, and, with ill-conceived impatience, exclaimed, "I am listening."

Raymond's observation was aroused. Her manner was certainly peculiar. However, he gave her in rapid words a clear and accurate account of the events of the evening, but omitting any hint of his interest in Simone, and attributing his hatred of Combelaire entirely to the old enmity. He expected that Madame Cornevin would make some objections. However, she simply said: "Very well. I will see my sister to-morrow before noon."

"And when shall I know the result of your step?"

"Come to-morrow night at this same hour."

This was more than Raymond had hoped. "I have something else to ask, madame."

"And what is that?"

"I must beg you not to mention to my mother that I have seen you."

"I will keep your secret."

When a person is in a hurry to get rid of an unwelcome guest, his or her answers are apt to be summary. Raymond was aware of this, and strange conjectures flitted through his mind. Just then he felt certain that he heard a chair moved in the next room. "If we had these papers," he said.

"Yes, it would be a great help," answered Madame Cornevin, quickly rising as she spoke.

This was such a positive request for him to withdraw, that Raymond dared not linger. "To-morrow evening, then?" he said, as he turned to the door.

"Yes," said Madame Cornevin—"yes; that is understood."

And she took up her candle and preceded Raymond on to the landing. Hardly had his foot touched the stairs than he heard the door close again. If any other woman had been in question Raymond would have been forced to the most singular suspicions. Misconduct is confined to no age among women; but Madame Cornevin's reputation had never been breathed upon. "And yet," he said to himself, "her agitation was apparent, and she literally put me out-of-doors. What was that noise I heard? Was she not alone? Not alone! Who could have been at that hour in a room occupied by her three daughters? Who could she have an interest in concealing? Her husband, Laurent Cornevin?" As this idea flashed through his mind, Raymond started. "And why not?" he said to himself. "Laurent Cornevin is a man of prodigious courage, but he is human all the same. Who could say that in some moment of profound discouragement he has not revealed himself to his wife, and that he sometimes comes to visit her in secret?"

The more Raymond thought of this, the more convinced he became of the correctness of his supposition. He was almost tempted to rush back, ring until she opened the door, and then say to her: "Your husband is here—I must speak to him. My happiness and my life depend on it." If he were right, Madame Cornevin would not have the presence of mind to contradict him. Yes, but if he were mistaken? "Clearly," he muttered, "clearly I cannot risk that!" But, as he walked along, he said to himself: "To-morrow, when I go to see her again, I shall be very unfortunate or very stupid if I don't get hold of something which will confirm or dispel this idea."

It was past midnight when he entered his mother's presence, for with his sister she was waiting for him. "I have been very anxious," said Madame Delorge, "for Monsieur Roberjot told me this very evening that a determined resistance is to be made against the empire. Do your duty, my son, but be very prudent; remember that you will be especially watched—and think of the triumph it will be for our enemies if you furnish them with an excuse for involving you in trouble."

He reassured his mother, and bade her good-night. His sister murmured, as he kissed her: "Poor Raymond! Why will you not trust me?"

The fatigues of this harassing day had one good result—they brought him slumber. He slept until ten o'clock, when he was awakened by old Krauss coming in with two letters. At the sight of one of them Raymond started for he recognized Simone's writing. His hands trembled to that degree, that it was almost impossible for him to break the seal.

This is what he read at last: "I had lost all consciousness of what was going on about me, when, as my mother said, you broke out into violent denunciations of the Count de Combeldaine. I must repeat to you, therefore, my best and only friend, what I have already said—that any violence at this hour will render all that I have suffered utterly useless, and at the same time, do no good. I have taken it upon myself to promise the Duchess de Maillefert that you will resign yourself to our sad fate. It is a horrible sacrifice, I know; but it is on my knees that I ask for it, and in the name of the Past. Will you refuse me? Am I wrong in my reliance on your affection? Answer me."

SIMONE."

Hot tears, as burning as molten lead, fell from Raymond's eyes. "She has been compelled to write!" he muttered. "And how am I to reply to these prayers dictated by her relatives?"

The other letter was from the Society of the Friends of Justice—which he had neglected for some time: “Be at the Rue des Cinq-Moulins, at Montmartre to-night at nine o’clock, without fail. Matters of the highest importance will be brought before the Society.” Then followed the forms only known by members of the Society, and which guaranteed the authenticity of all documents.

Nine o’clock! and it was at eleven that Raymond was to be at Madame Cornevin’s. “Nevertheless, I will go,” he said to himself. And at half-past eight he started.

The weather was foggy, and the pavements covered with mud. The outer boulevards presented their usual animated appearance at that hour of the evening. The cafés and taverns were crowded, and the rattle and clink of glasses could be heard. Groups of young men and women passed by, laughing and talking loudly, and grisettes wrapped in cloaks hurried to a rendezvous or a ball. Then came a drunken man. Alas! Raymond was tempted to envy this drunken man, for he was weary of the state of perpetual anxiety in which his life was spent.

“At this very moment,” he thought, “according to Madame Cornevin’s success or failure with Flora Misri, my last chance is assured or it has escaped me altogether.”

His mind was so absorbed in this idea that he had paid little attention to the summons of his secret society. It only recurred to him on reaching the house, which he found to be lighted up. He gave the pass-word to the “brother” who mounted guard at the door, and then went up the stairs. About fifteen “Friends of Justice” were already assembled, and one of them, a physician—a stout, ruddy faced man, better known by his advanced opinions than by his medical attainments—was drawing in forcible language an exact picture, as he swore, of the moral and material state of Paris. After this orator came another, who with a dozen journals open in his hand, undertook to prove that the Provinces only awaited a signal from Paris to rise in a body and put an end to the imperial *regime*. Immediately two other members started up to announce their wishes and opinions. They disputed; and their words became so sharp that the chairman called them both to order.

Thereupon Raymond requested permission to say a few words. “Citizens,” he began, “allow me to remind you that it is nearly ten o’clock, and that it is time to bring forward the important matters which have called us together.”

“What matters?” asked the chairman in surprise.

“Why those respecting which I was summoned here.”

“Summoned!”

“Yes, this morning—by a letter.”

Every face was turned toward the chairman, whose countenance evinced considerable astonishment. “You received a letter?” he said to Raymond; “and from whom?”

“I thought it was from you, sir,” said Raymond, as drawing it from his pocket, he added: “Here it is!”

Not a word was spoken after the chairman took the letter. He began by examining the paper, the seal and post-mark, after which he looked at the writing. “This is amazing!” he exclaimed. Twenty questions were addressed to him from every part of the room, but he did not answer any of them. “There has been no communication sent for days,” he continued. “Neither I, nor the secretary, nor a member of the committee has written.”

“No one!”

"And yet you have received a letter which presents every indication of having been sent from me. These are all my private signs."

The chairman handed the letter to the person next to him. It circulated from hand to hand, and everybody muttered in turn; "Incredible! I should have been taken in myself."

"Yes; so would everybody," cried the chairman, "and that is the worst feature in the case!"

It was not necessary for him to say this, for every one understood him.

"Where does this letter come from?" he continued. "Is it a joke? I don't think so. Is there a traitor among us who has written it? If so, what could be his motive? Must we consider it as the work of the police?"

This last word fell on the assembly like a shower-bath. Faces became pale, and glances were turned to the doors and windows as if in search of a means of escape. More than one Friend of Justice fancied he already heard the doors of his prison cell creak on its hinges. "The police," continued the chairman, "has apparently discovered the existence of our association. To many of us that means exile or imprisonment. But let us look at this more closely. Why should the police write this letter?"

This question was the signal for a violent discussion. Some of the members insisted that their plans should be more speedily put into execution, others proposing that the society should be dissolved until a more propitious season. At midnight the assembly had resolved on nothing, except that they would call a general meeting at once. Two members were then sent out to reconnoitre, and returned to say that there were no suspicious signs to be detected. Then one by one the members filed out, Raymond among the last, just as the clock was striking one.

The night was very dark, and, seen through the fog, the street lamps were no brighter than lighted cigar tips. Raymond knew it would simply be folly to look around him, to try and ascertain if he were followed, and he did not think of it for a moment. He had far more reasons for alarm than his political friends had, as he was well aware. He recognized Combelaïne's treacherous hand in this last blow. And a presentiment told him that this letter concealed a snare. What did his enemies now propose to do? To get rid of him probably. After Flora Misri's confidences, he had become too dangerous not to trouble the slumber of all these scoundrels. What, then, would be more simple than to arrest him "in the very act"—that is, at the place where the secret society met—to sentence and dispatch him to Cayenne?

His knowledge of the circumstances imposed on him certain obligations which he was too honest to evade. Before the meeting broke up he had told his political friends all he could to put them on the right track, but without imparting to them secrets which were not his own. However, they paid little attention to his words, for he was a very unimportant member of the society; and they thought him rather conceited to imagine that the police had concocted this false letter for himself alone. So little did they attend to his remarks that no one offered to accompany him home.

But he did not dream of danger. As he walked along the outer boulevard, now silent and deserted, he only thought of Madame Cornevin, who had been expecting him, and of the suspense she would endure until he could with decency present himself in the morning. He had just reached the end of the Boulevard de la Chapelle, when two or three men ran hastily past him. He hardly noticed them, being still absorbed in wonder as to the result of Madame Cornevin's application to her sister. Of course a great deal depended on what Flora Misri had done after her flight. Had she seen the

Count de Combeldaine either that night, or in the morning? If she had, there was not a vestige of hope. If she had not, then all depended on Madame Cornevin's tact.

He was walking slowly, when about midway down the Boulevard Rochechouart he heard some moans. They seemed to come from a bench a few steps off. He peered through the darkness, and fancied he could see a black mass on the ground. He hesitated, and then moved on as the moans grew louder.

The most ordinary prudence enjoined him to observe great caution; for every Parisian knows this to be a common device of scoundrels to get their victims into their power. But Raymond was not prudent. He advanced until he found himself standing over a man who seemed to be in terrible convulsions. Moved by pity, he stooped down.

And at the same moment a terrible blow, such a blow as a butcher would fell an ox with, struck him on his neck, at the base of his head. A hair's breadth higher and he would have been killed. But he was only partially stunned, and a moment later he shouted "Help! Help!"

The summons to the secret society was now explained. He knew that he was trapped. Only those who have seen death so near can ever know the world of thoughts which surged through his brain in that brief moment. "Poor mother!" he murmured, thinking of the unhappy woman who was waiting for his return at that very moment, and who at dawn would receive his body. Then Simone's name escaped his lips. In his pocket there was a letter from her, the last he had received. He knew that it would be found and read, and that it would perhaps compromise her, or at all events warrant her being summoned as a witness. So he took the letter and conveyed it to his lips, intending to swallow it.

This was the last act he was conscious of. Three men surrounded him, and he was unable to defend himself, for he was dizzy from the terrible blow he had received. "Help!" he cried once more. But at the same moment he received a thrust from the blade of a knife between his shoulders. A mortal chill seemed to strike his heart, and he fell, stiff and unconscious, face downwards, on the ground.

When his senses came back he found himself in an unknown place, stretched out on the billiard table of a café. A man about his own age was leaning over him examining his wound with the dexterity of a medical practitioner.

Two other men were curiously watching the process, while the waiter of the café, in his white apron, held the candle to afford the doctor the light he required. Near a table, moreover, a stout little woman was tearing an old napkin into strips.

Raymond saw all this as if in a dream, and so indistinctly that his eyes closed again. The first idea he was conscious of was one of wonder that he was still living. If, as he believed, he had been assailed by the Count de Combeldaine's paid assassins, how was it that the miscreants had not finished him? Had they learned their trade so poorly that they had believed him dead? He did not know the gravity of his wound, but he felt quite certain that his life was not in danger. He heard the physician say, moreover, as he put on the bandages, "He will be on his feet again in less than a month."

Raymond felt very thankful on learning this, and with a mighty effort he asked to be told what had happened. He was then informed that the café was called the Café de Péricles, and was kept by a worthy Prussian, Justus

Putzenhofer, with the assistance of his wife and a cousin named Adonis. The gentlemen who had come to his aid were the habitués of this café, Dr. Valentin Legris, M. Rivet, a merchant in the neighbourhood, and an enthusiastic journalist, M. Aristide Peyrolas. These three gentlemen, indifferent to police regulations, were finishing their game of whist, when they heard a shout for help, which is not an agreeable sound after midnight on the outer boulevards. They rushed out at once, but they were too late to prevent the crime, as Raymond already lay on the ground; and they could hear the flying feet of the assassins far down the street.

Raymond listened in silent wonder. Could it be, after all, that he had been attacked by ordinary thieves? He asked to have his clothes examined, and found that his watch and pocket-book were gone. He had been robbed! Did it therefore follow that the assassins were not in the pay of M. de Combelaïne and his friends? By no means. For it is the ABC of the spadassini's profession to rob the man who is killed, in order to lead investigation astray.

Then Raymond remembered the men who had run past him. They had gone on undoubtedly to prepare their ambush. But his certainty as to their character was not absolute—and so he murmured aloud: "Were they really robbers?"

This was not much to say—but it was enough to arouse the attention of a quick-witted person like Dr. Legris. So, when Raymond had given an account of what had happened, the doctor remarked, in a tone which was too easy and careless to be altogether natural: "You will have to say all this before a commissary of police."

"No, indeed!" exclaimed Raymond; "by no means!"

And, in fact, how could he file a complaint—and against whom? To provoke an inquiry without naming Combelaïne, would be simply to put the investigators off the track. To give Combelaïne's name would involve the Duchess de Maillefert, her son, and even Simone herself—and at the same time provoke the Duke de Maumussy, M. Verdale, and Flora Misri. Then again, one of the first questions addressed to Raymond would be: "Where did you pass the evening? Where were you coming from?" To name the Rue des Cinq Moulins would be simply betraying the Friends of Justice. And that the police knew and watched over this association was proved by this forged letter, which could only have been procured through some traitor's aid. All these considerations presented themselves with relentless logic to Raymond's mind. And so, in the tone with which a man asks an enormous favour, he entreated his rescuers to keep this attack, of which he had been the victim, absolutely secret.

It was asking a great deal, particularly without giving any explanation. Every one, however, followed the example of Dr. Legris, and promised silence and secrecy. Then Raymond breathed more freely; and after giving his name and address, and a promise to call at the café as soon as he was better, he started to leave. He got on his clothes without much difficulty; but when he attempted to stand, he tottered and would have fallen but for the doctor's assistance. "I must have a cab," he said.

At all hours of the night cabs are to be found on the outer boulevards, going back to their stables or to the railway stations. Adonis went out, and soon returned with one, the driver of which was tempted by the promise of a large gratuity.

When Raymond was installed on the cushions, the doctor insisted on going with him, saying that he could not allow him to go off alone in such

a state. Raymond would not have submitted to this from any other person, but he was attracted by the physician's face, which was both keen and frank in expression ; and besides, he felt that he needed him. He was determined to conceal his misadventure from his mother, and he proposed to feign a cold or lumbago. But if he were obliged to remain in bed for some days, who would take care of him ? Dr. Legris was the very man, of course. As to the rest, he could trust in old Krauss.

This was all settled in his mind when the cab stopped at his mother's door. The air and increasing fever lent him certain strength which he knew would be needed to prevent his mother feeling any alarm. He excused himself to the doctor for not inviting him to come in, for at that hour it would have disturbed Madame Delorge. "The banisters will help me up," he said.

He then shook hands with the doctor, and entered the house. But it is one thing to drag one's legs over a level surface and another to climb stairs, as Raymond quickly found out. However he set his teeth firmly, and although the pain was atrocious, he succeeded. Fortunately old Krauss was alone, and when he saw Raymond, whiter than a spectre, with his disordered garments covered with mud, advancing towards him, he lifted his arms to heaven, and, in a husky voice, exclaimed, "Wounded !"

Faint and exhausted from the exertions he had made, Raymond could only nod.

"By Combelaïne or Maumussy ?" asked the old servant.

"By their people, probably."

The old man took his young master in his arms, and carried him rather than helped him to his room ; and then as he undressed him, he said :

"Your coat is wet with blood, and your overcoat too ; both have been cut through by a knife. You were struck in the back, then. I know the handiwork of the villains who killed my general." But when he discovered that the wound had been dressed—"Ah ! you have seen a doctor," he exclaimed. "Yes, and a good one ; the bandage is put on as it ought to be. Our own surgeon in my time couldn't have done better."

Raymond was obliged to ask him not to talk any more. "Hide my clothes," he said, "and when my mother is up in the morning, tell her I came in very tired, and that I need rest. But mind you come to me at nine o'clock, whether I am asleep or awake. I have a letter to send to Madame Cornevin. It is a secret which I confide to you, and you are not to speak of it to anyone. Now go. You see this wound is nothing."

His wound, it is true, presented no bad symptoms ; but it was painful enough to prevent him from closing his eyes all night. He lay thinking, and in the silence and darkness he applied all his penetration to analyse this last event. How dared Combelaïne, this prudent, cunning man, resort to an attack of this nature in the public streets of Paris ? It was certainly a most decisive step to take, and an efficacious one, so far as disposing of an enemy went, but it left a most uncomfortable piece of evidence—the body—behind. Moreover, it required accomplices, who, in nine cases out of ten, turn on the instigator, and expose the plot. "It must be," concluded Raymond, "that his situation, which I believed impregnable, is really horribly compromised—that he knows himself to be on the verge of ruin."

And it was at this moment that Raymond saw himself down on his bed, and for a week, at the least, prevented from acting. What could not Combelaïne achieve during these days of security—particularly if he had prepared

everything for a rapid denouement? A week! Why in that time he could marry Simone, and Raymond could not oppose it, as he had sworn to do, even by violence, even by crime. A cold perspiration broke out on his forehead at this frightful thought, and, fever doing its work, a slight delirium set in, and he seemed to see the Duchess de Maumussy, Madame de Maillefert, Baron Verdale, and Flora Misri all bending over him with sneers and laughs.

When Krauss entered the room in the morning, Raymond was sleeping quietly; but, true to his word, the old soldier awoke his master. "I told madame that you had a severe cold, and that you would remain in bed, you thought. How do you feel?"

Raymond was suffering intensely. He said, however, that he was better, and told Krauss to give him a pencil and paper. He wrote to Madame Cornevin as follows:—"An unforeseen circumstance, and one quite independent of my will, prevented me, dear madame, from keeping the engagement which you were kind enough to allow me to make with you. To-day I am kept in my bed by an attack of lumbago, so that it is impossible for me to go and see you to ask for the result of your application to Madame —. Pray let me know it without delay. You can easily imagine the suspense in which I am. I rely on your promise to keep the secret. It is now more indispensable than ever. R."

He folded and sealed this letter. "Krauss," he said, "I wish you would find an excuse for going to Madame Cornevin's."

"Oh! that's easy enough. I have to take back some patterns which she sent to my young lady."

"Very well—then you can easily manage so that no one shall see you give her this letter. Wait for an answer; and, Krauss, make all possible dispatch."

Krauss still lingered. "I think, sir, I ought to say one thing to you."

"And what is that?"

"Last night, about midnight, a man, in a blouse—a big fellow—with a fresh coloured face, came to the concierge, and asked if you were in. He said he was one of your old workmen."

"What did the concierge say?"

"That you were out, of course. The man seemed very much annoyed, and said he would call again. And about one o'clock he came to the door. The concierge had gone to bed. He pulled the cord, and in a minute more heard a voice call out, 'Well, has he come in?' The concierge flew into a rage. 'Bless my soul!' he cried, 'is this an hour to come here after any of our people? No, Monsieur Delorge has not come in, and you had better take yourself off!' Upon which the man decamped." Raymond listened attentively. "In my opinion," resumed Krauss, shaking his head gravely—"in my opinion, that animal was a spy—an accomplice of the fellows who attacked you."

"Very possibly," said Raymond, although he thought precisely the contrary.

By the light of recent events he clearly saw that two intrigues were going on about him. For some time he had been quite certain that he was watched and followed. He had also decided that the surveillance was double. One watcher had saved his life at Neuilly and La Villette; the other had prepared the snare into which he had fallen on the Boulevard Rochechouart. Combelaïne managed one of these surveillances. But the other? Who could pay for that except Laurent Cornevin? And in his

own heart he believed that the man who had incurred the wrath of the concierge by inquiring for him was Laurent himself, and, moreover, that it was he who had been with Madame Cornevin. "He expected me," thought Raymond, "and, knowing the immense interest I had in being punctual, he was astonished at not seeing me at the appointed hour, and so he came here to find out about me."

All this seemed so plausible that he said to Krauss, hastily, "Give me that letter again."

And the old soldier having done so, Raymond hastily wrote a postscript. "I know," he said, "the cause of your trouble the last time I saw you. In the name of Heaven confide in me!"

Whether he was right or wrong in his conjectures, he could see no harm in writing as he did. But the tedium of waiting was dreadful. Krauss certainly could not have arrived at his destination when Raymond began to expect him back, and said to himself, "Deuce take the old fellow! He ought to be here by now."

Suddenly a slight noise was heard. It was his mother, who cautiously opened the door and looked in.

"I am not asleep!" he exclaimed.

She thereupon came to his bedside and stood looking at him. "How pale you are!" she said. "I think it would be best to send for a physician."

"By no means," he answered decidedly. "I shall be on my feet again in three days."

Madame Delorge shook her head. "Do as you think best," she answered simply. But she said this in such a tone that Raymond was troubled to the very depths of his soul.

For the first time the suspicion occurred to him that his mother was not deceived, and that if she chose to appear so, it was out of that delicacy which mothers often evince. What did she think then, however? But he could read nothing in her face, which had quickly resumed its ordinary calmness of expression.

"Remember, my dear boy," she said, as she kissed his brow, "that I have no other reliance than you in this world, and that all my hopes rest upon you."

With his sister Pauline, Raymond found that he must be still more on his guard. She looked at him so keenly that he turned away his head, "Is it politics," she asked, "that have made you ill?" Fortunately, she was called, and hastily departed, leaving Raymond in a state of excessive irritation.

Dr. Legris was ushered in at this moment. "Well! How are you?" he said, when he reached Raymond's bedside.

"I am in absolute agony."

The door was shut, so that there was no imprudence in speaking like this. "Is it your wound?" asked Dr. Legris.

"What else should it be, pray?"

The doctor did not reply directly. "It is difficult to understand," he said, as if uttering an axiom of general utility, "the precise influence which the mind has over wounds."

From any other person Raymond would not have accepted this inflection very calmly, but Dr. Legris had already inspired him with that confidence which precedes friendship.

"What wouldn't I give to be able to rise!" he sighed.

"You must not think of such a thing," answered the doctor, imperiously, "under five or six days—and not even then, possibly."

He had seated himself, and begun to write a prescription, when the door suddenly opened, and Krauss appeared. The old soldier, taking it for granted that his master was alone, had drawn a letter from his pocket, but he quickly thrust it back on seeing a stranger. "Did you not ring, sir?" he asked, anxious to find an excuse for his appearance.

"No," answered Raymond, "I did not ring, but you come just in season. This gentleman is a friend and a physician, and he will tell you what you are to do for me."

The doctor was acute enough to see that he was in the way, and so in a very few minutes he departed. As soon as he had gone, Raymond exclaimed: "Did you give my letter to Madame Cornevin?"

"As soon as I was alone with her," said Krauss.

"Did she read it in your presence?"

"Yes."

"And how did she look while she read it?"

From the glance that the old soldier gave his master, it was clear that he had an idea in his head. "At the beginning," he answered, "she was just the same as usual, but all at once she started."

"You are sure of it?"

"Certain—and she turned as white as a sheet."

"But she said nothing?"

"No; she only drew a long breath, and looked round as if she were frightened. Then she wrote this answer."

Raymond thought no more of his wound. He snatched hold of the letter, and turned it over and over, hesitating to open it, as he felt certain that it contained words which would influence his whole destiny:—"Faithful to my promise, dear Raymond," wrote Madame Cornevin, "I went to Madame Misri's yesterday, at nine o'clock. I found her in despair, sobbing and tearing her hair. She had just returned home, having spent the night with one of her friends. During her absence all the papers in her possession had been stolen. My visit was useless, and so I withdrew. Yours faithfully.—J. CORNEVIN."

"P.S.—I do not understand your strange postscript. What do you mean? There was no trouble but yours the other night, my poor child!"

One by one Raymond had seen all the hopes he cherished fade away. He had come to regard misfortune as the law of his life. So this letter did not surprise him. "She distrusts me," he thought. But his opinion was in no degree changed, and he felt more than ever convinced that Laurent was with his wife. But why should Madame Cornevin distrust him? Might it not be that her husband had dictated this reply—and if so, why should he persist in this impenetrable incognito? What terrible revenge was he maturing for all his wrongs?

These preoccupations at first rendered Raymond oblivious of the intelligence that Flora Misri's papers were stolen. The thief, of course, was De Combelaïne. And yet, if he had obtained possession of these dangerous documents, why should he have had recourse to the assistance of assassins? "I shall see Madame Cornevin on Sunday, at last," sighed Raymond, worn out by thinking, "and I will make her explain herself."

Vain project. For the first time for eighteen years Madame Cornevin failed to spend Sunday with Madame Delorge. "She is afraid of me," said Raymond, "which shows me I am correct in my suspicions. Good heavens! how long must I lie here?"

It was not until six days had elapsed that Legris ceased his professional visits and came as a friend. It was clear that the sharp-eyed doctor had scented a mystery, and that he would have been happy to solve it. But Raymond did not care about this. After so many years of absolute solitude, he experienced a feeling of positive relief in the companionship of a man of his own age—of a man who was evidently so superior in all respects—whose practical good sense was apparent in all he did, and who had that peculiar experience of life in general, and of Paris in particular, to be acquired in the medical profession. The hour which M. Legris spent every day by Raymond's bedside was the most agreeable of the twenty-four to our young hero—the only one, in fact, in which he was in the least relieved of his own affairs and melancholy thoughts. All the rest of the day was inexpressibly weary. And yet everybody seemed to believe in the reality of the ailment he professed, and both Roberjot and Ducoudray paid him such constant visits that he was rarely left alone. Through M. Ducoudray he heard all the gossip of Paris, while M. Roberjot acquainted him with all the details of Pierre Bonaparte's affair.

But Raymond listened with an inattentive ear. What did he care for Prince Pierre? What were politics to him? It was to the Maillefert mansion that his thoughts had flown. What was going on there? What had become of the quarrel which had seemed on the point of occurring between Philippe and the Count de Combelaïne? Whom could he trust to make enquiries? He thought of sending Krauss, and then of Dr. Legris. Should he send one of them to Miss Lydia Dodge? Would she not refuse to receive them? Or, if they succeeded in reaching her, would she not refuse to speak? Raymond at last became anxious about the apartment he had taken in the name of Paul de Lespéran. Would not the concierge begin to gossip if his absence lasted any longer?

In this way the days passed on. On Wednesday Raymond sat up for a few hours. On Saturday he was up all day. On Sunday he had at last decided to go out, when Krauss appeared with a letter which had just been left. The dirty envelope, the writing, the orthography, the ink, and the words written across the corner, "Personal and Immediate," all bespoke the anonymous letter, the most cowardly, shameful, disgusting weapon that can be used. Raymond was on the point of throwing it into the fire. But he suddenly remembered that he was not in a position to neglect anything, and so he broke the seal.

It was, indeed, an anonymous letter. An unknown individual, who signed himself a friend, begged him to go that same night, at midnight, to the ball at La Reine Blanche. There a man would accost him and take him to a place where a scene which he ought to view would take place. "It is a mere mystification," murmured Raymond, as he crushed the letter in his hand and flung it on the floor.

But five minutes had not elapsed before he asked himself if he were not hasty in his decision. He picked up the letter, smoothed it out; and read it again. He noticed one strange point which at first had escaped his observation, but which now struck him with astonishment. The person who gave him the rendezvous at La Reine Blanche, said, "I come from the Garden of the Elysée." Was it mere chance which had caused this terribly significant phrase in the letter? And some lines further on: "If Monsieur Delorge is not willing to do this for his own sake, he will do it for her's." She—who could she be, if it were not Simone de Maillefert? Raymond must indeed have been an utter simpleton not to see that the person who

wrote this letter was thoroughly acquainted with his life, with all his sorrows, his hatred, and love. And to whom among all those who knew his life could he attribute this anonymous letter if not to Combelaïne? Yes, to Combelaïne or to Laurent Cornevin. If it were Laurent, Raymond had everything to hope. But if it came from the Count de Combelaïne, he had everything to fear. "No matter," he said, "I will go."

And yet, was it not, in his present state of weakness, an act of the most absolute temerity to go alone into the lion's den? But who could accompany him? There was no one but Krauss. "And why not Dr. Legris?" said the young fellow with a start. And indeed, when the doctor came in, Raymond, without the slightest preamble, handed him the letter to read.

The doctor was at first absolutely stupefied, but presently expressed his opinion that this was a snare. Raymond admitted that such had been his own idea. He said, however, that he was fully determined to go to La Reine-Blanche, and to go alone, if need be. The doctor accepted this indirect invitation, and it was all the more meritorious on his part as no explanation was given him. Raymond and M. Legris accordingly repaired to the ball-room, where they were at last approached by a man who, having pronounced the words, "I come from the Garden of the Elysée," bade them follow him.

They did so. They were introduced into the Montmartre Cemetery, and by the light of the moon they witnessed that strange scene, in which five persons—four men and a woman, whom the others called Madame la Duchesse—audaciously scaled the walls of the burial-ground and violated a grave to ascertain if a coffin were empty! The watchers' guide abandoned them and fled, and all their efforts to find him and compel him to give an explanation of his conduct utterly failed, so that they remained face to face with an absolutely startling problem.

Never had Dr. Legris' curiosity been so highly excited. But subtle as was his penetration, he was so entirely ignorant of Raymond's antecedents, that he had no basis on which to found any conclusions. Besides, had he known anything of Raymond's past, it is doubtful if the knowledge would have been of use to him. Indeed it was in vain that Raymond himself tried to connect this scene in the cemetery with any circumstance in his life.

However, he felt that he had no right to ask the assistance of Dr. Legris without explaining the whole situation. Accepting the services of a friend in this way was to incur certain tacit obligations. Raymond now, more than ever, realized how useful a friend could be to him as the hour of the dénouement gradually approached. So he begged the doctor to come and dine with him at his mother's that night, adding that they would talk afterwards, and that he would open his whole heart.

Part II.

LAURENT CORNEVIN.

I.

DR. VALENTIN LEGRIS was not of those gay students who, after years of beer and absinthe, carry off their diplomas through sheer audacity of good luck. Sprung from a poor family—his father had been a carpenter—Dr. Legris owed his modest position entirely to his own intelligence and industry.

He had been irregularly educated in various directions—at one time at a school which clothed and fed him on the express condition that he would win the state prizes at the end of the year ; and he was usher in another establishment at the time he took his bachelor's degree. The next year he made enough by giving lessons to buy a few books, and pay for his entrance fee at the medical school. He often suffered ; for young fools round about him, kept in idle luxury by their wealthy families, regarded poverty as a crime, or as a folly worthy of ridicule. But he was not of the stuff that is seriously affected by such things, or by jests anent the shabbiness of his boots and the old-fashioned cut of his coat. His natural gaiety was not embittered ; it was simply sharpened to that point of sceptical irony which becomes men who realize their own value, and who intend to scale all obstacles in their path.

He could never be induced to affect a pedantic gravity far from his natural character, nor to find an element of success in patient hypocrisy, like others. He was not adverse to pleasure, and he proved it whenever, by some lucky chance, a few unexpected gold pieces fell into his hands. Several of his professors considered him too independent, and even went so far as to reproach him for evincing at times a spirit of contradiction and insubordination. His examination was none the less a triumph, however, and one of so brilliant a nature that the faculty looked forward to great things from him in the future. Unfortunately, his diploma did not bring him a large income ; and after receiving this parchment, he found himself as often as before face to face with the dismal problem of how to live.

For weeks his life was very hard. He could be seen then with a careworn brow and lingering step, wandering about in the halls of the medical school, or standing in front of the panel, which hangs on the right on entering, and bears mention of all applications and offers. On one side was the advertisement of a ship about to sail for the Polar Seas, and wanting a surgeon ; that of a rich foreigner, old and sick, who desired the exclusive care of a competent physician ; that of a country village, where the old practitioner had just died, and which took this means of making its wants known. On the other side there were five, ten, fifteen young men, who, with diplomas, but without money, offered to accompany some young and interesting invalid to Italy, or even to give advice in the back shop of some apothecary.

"People must have food, you know." This was what Dr. Legris said to himself more and more bitterly each day, and he had almost decided to apply for the ship and the Polar Seas, where at least he should sit down at table twice a-day, when one of his comrades presented him to the celebrated

English physician, Harvey. Dr. Harvey was then residing in Paris for the winter, and had just issued his famous work on poisons. He needed an assistant, and took a great fancy to the young medical student. At the end of a year, Dr. Harvey had become so much attached to him, indeed, that he made him an offer to accompany him to London, with an assurance that he would answer for his future.

Although Legris was profoundly touched by this kindness, he refused the offer, and was installed a few months later as nurse-surgeon at the Paris hospital of La Pitié. The years that then elapsed were monotonous, but interesting ones. He brought to his work, and to the exercise of his profession, all that passionate obstinacy which alone makes a man superior. He expended all his energy in struggles against illness, suffering, and death; and displayed alike a sagacity and fecundity of resources and a boldness and patience which astonished the oldest practitioners. This was no reason why all these men should be his friends, and yet they were so. They knew him to be poor, and they took every opportunity of calling him in for consultation, and also sent him patients whenever it was possible.

Never did the celebrated Professor B—meet a difficult or obstinate case in his practice without calling in his assistant. This situation under one of the shining lights of science brought Dr. Legris into relation with a great many persons. Some of these connections were simple and agreeable; others were flattering; again, others were important enough to be of use to him whenever he left La Pitié. It was in this way he became acquainted with the Duke de Maumussy, when the latter thought he had been poisoned in 1866; with the Princess d'Eljensen, when she was thrown from her carriage at the races; and with Madame Verdale, after that famous ball given by the baron, when the poor woman was so cruelly burned by a fire that broke out in the midst of the entertainment.

But as Dr. Legris' friends said, he did not possess the faculty of utilizing these people. The fact was, he did not care to do so. One of those all-absorbing passions, which the wisest of men cannot control, had taken possession of him. He had fallen in love with a young girl of the working classes, and she trifled with him. He was poor, and she coveted toilettes, diamonds, and carriages; all the brutal splendour which torments the brains of poor girls and speedily leads them to the prison of Saint Lazare or the hospital. However, the doctor loved her, and he struggled to give her what she desired. So his existence during the last few months he spent at the hospital was a perfect hell. Still he bore everything until positive knowledge of her infidelity was forced upon him—and then he broke with her. He had saved a little money, and with this he established himself at Montmartre, on the Place du Théâtre. In less than six months his practice was larger than he could attend to. It was not an especially lucrative one, no doubt, but still it was amply sufficient for his needs.

Toil and time did their work, and by degrees he recovered from the shock he had experienced; the past faded away, his old ambition resumed its sway, and he determined, as soon as he had saved a few thousand francs, to establish himself in central Paris. Such, then, was the man in whom Raymond, in his extreme distress, had decided to confide without restriction.

On taking leave, young Delorge had said: "To-night at six o'clock," and as he returned to the Rue Blanche he discovered a thousand reasons for applauding his resolution. This time, thanks to Krauss, Madame Delorge was ignorant that her son had passed the night out of doors, and

so she received him as usual. "I have taken the liberty, dear mother," he said, as he embraced her, "to invite one of my friends to dinner, and I beg of you to receive him cordially."

It was the first time since his return to Paris that he had introduced a guest to the house, and so his mother evinced a little surprise. "Do I know this friend?" she asked.

"I think not, my dear mother, but he is an extremely clever person; some four or five years older than myself—Dr. Legris."

"You never spoke of him to me," said Madame Delorge, as she rang the bell. "But that makes no difference; if he is your friend, it is quite sufficient. And as he is a physician, he is probably something of an epicure. I must interview Françoise in order to give him a good dinner."

Françoise was the cook. She soon appeared, and while Madame Delorge gave her orders, Mademoiselle Pauline approached her brother, and fixing her eyes on him, said: "Is not this Dr. Legris the gentleman who came to see you every day while you were in bed?"

"Precisely."

"Then—I understand."

"And what, pray?"

"I understand what the cold was which confined you to your bed, and why it was so promptly cured."

"Raymond concealed his impatience. "How exasperating this little girl is!" he thought, at the same time feeling somewhat mortified at being caught in his falsehood. However, he replied aloud: "Is it so extraordinary that one of my friends, who is a physician, should come and see me when I'm ill?" He rose as he said this to leave the room.

"Are you going?" exclaimed her sister.

"I am busy."

But as he reached the door she said: "What! not one moment longer? We have great news for you."

"News?"

"Yes; of Jean." Raymond looked at his sister, and detected a strange tremor in her voice. "This morning," she continued, "Madame Cornevin received a long letter from her son."

"Which she came to read to you?"

"Oh, no! she sent it. She has so much work to do, and is so busy, that it is impossible for her to get away from her workroom for an hour."

Raymond's suspicions quickened. "Poor Madame Cornevin," he said, in a low voice, "must be indeed crushed by work. On Sunday she could not come to dine with us—she was not here yesterday—and to-day she deprives herself of the pleasure of reading a letter from Jean. Don't you think this a little singular?"

Pauline coloured. "No, it does not strike me as singular," she said.

"You know, then, what important matters detain her?"

"Certainly. Is not this the gayest season of the year? Isn't to-morrow Shrove Tuesday? Are there not ball-dresses, fancy costumes, and the like to be made?" Pauline's blushes grew deeper as she spoke; her mother had heard her last words.

"I am sure," she interposed, "that Julia"—for she now always spoke of Madame Cornevin by her Christian name—"has a great deal to do; and yet I am a little surprised that she has not been able to find an hour to spend with us all the week."

Raymond shook his head, while watching his sister out of the corner of

his eye. He thought that it was himself that Madame Cornevin avoided, and that Pauline certainly suspected something. "I kept Jean's letter," continued Madame Delorge, "for you to see, my son."

This letter, as Raymond knew in advance, would give him no information. He was right; for Jean, faithful to this decision, breathed not one word of his journey, nor of his discoveries, nor of his father. He spoke of M. Pécheira, but only as a charming man, as a friend whose acquaintance he had made in Melbourne, and who had shown him all that was worth seeing there. He concluded by saying that his passage for Liverpool was taken on board a vessel which would leave Melbourne three weeks after the one which carried this letter.

"And so," said Raymond to his mother, as he handed her back the letter, "we may hope to see our traveller at almost any moment. He may not perhaps come for a month, but at the same time he may walk in to-morrow morning."

"You forget that he is on board a sailing vessel," said Pauline.

Raymond looked at her in astonishment. "How do you know that Jean took passage in a sailing vessel?" he asked.

She burst out laughing, with that nervous little laugh which sounds almost like a cough, and which is the resource of women in embarrassment. "Does he not say so in his letter?" she rejoined.

"No; he says nothing of the kind."

She shrugged her shoulders, and remarked, with feigned carelessness: "I must have dreamed it, then!"

Madame Delorge might be deceived by this remark, but Raymond was not. "Ah! ah!" he thought; "my sister is in direct communication with Master Jean."

But he was not displeased by this discovery, so constant and close was the intimacy between the two families. Only, if Jean had been in communication with Pauline since his departure, she had unquestionably been informed of all that had been hidden with such infinite care from her mother and Madame Cornevin. A man of twenty-five has no secrets from the woman he loves. This discovery gave Raymond a clue to the singular conduct of his sister—to the significant manner in which she spoke, and to her entreaties that he should trust in her. "It is clear," he thought, "that she knows all I know of Laurent Cornevin's existence!"

But this was no time to question Pauline. It was late, he was worn out with fatigue, and Dr. Legris might come earlier than was expected. So he took refuge in his little study, and had not been there very long lying on the sofa before he fell asleep, and dreamed that his dear doctor was sitting by him.

Dr. Legris, however, was at that moment in his own apartment, where he was hurrying through a consultation—hurrying through is the expression to use. He was not by any means naturally amiable, but his patients had never seen him in this exasperated, impatient mood. The fact is, that he knew himself to be expected in the Rue Blanche at six o'clock, and he not only had eight or ten visits to make, but he was eager to find himself alone for ten minutes, that he might reflect on the strange events which were about to interfere with the monotony of his life. "Yes," he thought, "this is certainly a most extraordinary story; for if any one had told me yesterday that it was possible for such an event as I witnessed in that cemetery to happen in the city of Paris, in the year 1870, in the midst of a great army of guardians and policemen, I should have laughed aloud!"

With all his anxiety and preoccupation, it was wonderful that the doctor, as he attended to patient after patient, was able to retain all his keen medical perception and *sang-froid*; but thanks to what Professor Bechat once called "the habits of the profession," he certainly succeeded in doing so. When the last visit was accomplished he uttered a sigh of relief, and dressed in haste to drive to the Rue Blanche.

Dr. Legris pleased Madame Delorge at first sight—and Madame Delorge was not easily pleased. She found him, as she told her son the next day, both acute and frank, which is a rare thing, as acuteness almost always precludes frankness. As for the doctor, he was struck by the distinguished bearing of Madame Delorge, and by Pauline's surprising beauty. The dinner, however, would not have been very cheerful had not the doctor possessed that precious faculty which allows a man to lay aside his most pressing and harassing cares, just as he lays aside his cigar on entering a drawing-room. He had seen too much and with too observant eyes for his conversation to be deficient of that delicate savour which is only imparted by a full knowledge of Parisian life. He wished to please and be pleased, so that considerable time elapsed after the dinner, and coffee had long since been served, when Raymond rose and said: "We are forgetting our business, dear doctor. Come, my mother and sister will excuse you."

And a moment later they were seated in Raymond's study, before a good fire, with the doors closed. The doctor had lighted his cigar and ensconced himself in a comfortable chair in front of the portrait of General Delorge, which puzzled him so much whenever he looked at that sword with its scabbard sealed with large red seals, and hanging right across the canvas.

This was the time selected by Raymond to disclose the history of his life to his new friend. At table, while Dr. Legris had talked to the ladies, Raymond had had time to reflect and decide how to condense this tale. His narrative was therefore remarkably clear, and yet precise enough not to leave out a single detail of any value. And when at last it was completed, he said: "Now, doctor, you know my life as thoroughly as I know it myself! and you are far better able than I to judge if my game be not irretrievably lost, and if it is not utter folly for me to continue to hope and keep up this contest any longer."

Dr. Legris did not reply immediately, but smoked on in silence until his cigar was exhausted. That he was thunderstruck was clear. He had expected something strange, but this exceeded his conjectures. His thoughts then flew back to himself. He remembered that he, too, had loved; that he, too, had had his days of despair and distrust, and yet what a difference there was between the unhappy passion which had blasted his life and the pure and noble love which he had just heard spoken of!

As Raymond spoke again he started, and in a voice that quivered with emotion, he said: "Upon my life, my dear Delorge, in my opinion, your position has never been better. I honestly believe that you have never been so near success."

After the events of the last few days and such a succession of disappointments, these words fell on Raymond's ears almost like mockery. "Doctor," he said reproachfully, "doctor!"

But Legris answered: "It is not my usual habit to preach optimism, but what have I to do with a result which is still in the future? A man of brain and heart must act as if he had everything to expect, and console himself if he fails as if he had never had anything to hope! It is Maistre who said that."

He rose as he spoke, and approaching the chimney-piece remained standing. His eyes flashed fire, and every feature bespoke energy and manly strength. He looked as he appeared at times at the bed-side of some patient suddenly struck down by a terrible malady, and on whom he felt he ought to try some heroic remedy. And after all was this not a consultation? "My dear Delorge," he cried, "we will give your enemies the rope with which they will hang themselves, I trust. They may instead of that, crush us—of course I admit this possibility—but we will show fight all the same!"

If fear be contagious, assurance is none the less so. On hearing the doctor express himself in this way, Raymond's courage and hopes rose fast.

"To begin with," said Dr. Legris, "who is the author, the instigator of this mysterious and altogether abominable intrigue which has taken Mademoiselle Simone from you, and by which it is proposed to give her to a scoundrel like Combelaïne? The facts are patent to the most ordinary intelligence; the instigator is the Duchess de Maumussy."

"I am certain of that."

"And so am I. Had she any interest in preventing your marriage? Evidently, and the most natural, and at the same time the most powerful in the world. You pleased her and she was rash enough to allow you to see it."

Raymond coloured. "I am not a conceited man," he muttered; "and it is a most painful thing for me to say—but——"

The doctor smiled. "I am aware," he said, "that a man is always supposed to occupy a ridiculous position when a woman loves him like that—in spite of himself. But here the fact is clear, and is not to be got over. And you—how did you reply to her significant advances? Like a simpleton, like an honest man as you are. A different man would have managed this dear duchess. He would have recognized the necessity of so doing, and would have soon managed her as he pleased. But the past is past. You are not aware, perhaps, that I have the pleasure of knowing this lady."

Raymond looked amazed. "You know Madame de Maumussy?" he asked.

"Indeed I do, though I am as yet but a little way up the ladder of medical fame." And, lighting a cigar, Legris continued: "When Monsieur de Maumussy fancied he had taken poison, which was about two years ago, I spent, I may say, some three weeks in his bed-room. Persuaded that some people wished his death, so that they might get possession of certain documents relating to the *coup d'état*, documents that he had steadily declined to give up—this noble person was literally dying of fear. He was frightfully afraid of poison, and thought he should find it even in plain boiled eggs. My especial duty was to examine every dish that was sent in. When he saw that I partook of them, and yet lived through that experience, he ventured to taste them himself—often before a mirror, to see if he turned pale, and with his hand on his stomach ready to ask me for an emetic at the slightest suspicion of colic. In the beginning I admit that the duke's terror and talk amused me, but at the end of four days I had become weary, more weary than I can tell you, and I should have deserted at once, had I not been as poor as Job, and if my dear and respected master had not stipulated that I should receive five louis per day. On account of this money I remained in the house; and merely to amuse myself I began to study the Duchess de Maumussy."

"She was quite as much bored with all these proceedings as myself."

Still she never left the little parlour next her husband's room ; she took care of him, and tasted his food, but she never ceased laughing at him, and telling him that after all a man can die but once, to which he replied, 'that might be, but he should like to make it as late as possible.' She had never seen me before—I was not one of her acquaintances, but she felt the necessity of talking—and then you know a physician is of no consequence. She simply thought aloud in my presence, and let me here assure you that she thought some very strange things. She astonished even me—and yet I had received many strange confidences in my time. When she talked to me of her beauty, of that rare and almost fatal beauty you know of, she frightened me. It was, she said, an exceptional power that had been given to her, and which she should not deserve, if she did not use it to achieve some great end—or even some crime—according to the occasion. Also to turn the heads of fools, or simply to please the man who should please her. I never saw the shadow of a scruple about her, but under all her languid grace I divined a soul of fire, and the eccentric imagination of an opium smoker. My dear fellow, this is the woman who loved you madly enough to throw herself at your head. So you can draw your own conclusions as to her feelings towards you when you disdained her, and towards Mademoiselle Simone, whom you preferred."

Raymond was silent ! Was this not almost precisely what the baron had said to him so long ago ? "Then," continued the doctor, "it is to Madame de Maumussy that we must attribute this plan of Mademoiselle Simone's marriage, and the choice of the husband also. Does not this very choice betray the hatred of a woman who believes herself scorned ? Who in fact did she choose ? A scoundrel utterly without honour or reputation. The man whom she loathes and despises more than any other man in the world—Combelaine himself."

Of this last point Raymond was utterly ignorant. "Do you mean," he exclaimed, "that the Duchess de Maumussy dislikes Combelaine ?"

"She told me so," answered the doctor with emphasis. "She told me so over and over again, and she also told me why. Do you know that it was the Count de Combelaine whom the Duke de Maumussy suspected of trying to poison him ?"

"Is it possible ?"

"And the duke himself openly spoke of his suspicions."

"Oh !"

"And he bade me increase my watchfulness on the days that Combelaine entered the room."

"But do you mean that he dared to come ?"

"Most certainly."

"And was received ?"

"Of course. How could De Maumussy and De Combelaine afford to come to an open rupture?—two men who had been so closely connected—two such friends ! It would have been scandalous."

Raymond was confounded.

"Then you can see that to make her vengeance all the more sure the duchess precisely chose this man. The difficulty was to induce Mademoiselle Simone to marry him—to give him her hand and fortune. Madame de Maillefert at first failed in the accomplishment of the task, but Madame de Maumussy determined to succeed."

Raymond started up. "Yes," he exclaimed, "she succeeded ! And how ? That is just what I want to know."

The doctor shrugged his shoulders. "After all," he said, "what does it matter? We know that they made Mademoiselle Simone believe, in some way or another, that this marriage alone could save the honour of the illustrious house of Maillefert. That is all we need to know at present. Now let us see what happened next. At first De Combelaine and the Mailleferts, mother and son, were dazzled with their good luck, and consequently were much pleased with each other. When they came to the question of dividing the spoils, however, there was a change. According to what you have been told, the Mailleferts have been fooled, and I must confess that I am not surprised. Now, they would like to break off this marriage, but it is impossible. Combelaine wishes it—and Combelaine is master of the situation."

The doctor began to grow a little excited. He was as yet only conjecturing on these points, but he seemed to discern the light which announced the truth as Aurora heralds the dawn. "Yes," he resumed, "Combelaine holds the young duke in some way, and through him the duchess. You can do nothing against him. He has, I am convinced, very little fear of Flora Misri. Besides, he will do his best to hasten a marriage which will give him, the tarnished adventurer, an assured position as a member of one of the oldest families in the kingdom, as well as the possession of immense wealth. However, Combelaine is not as completely victorious as we have been led to believe. Between him and the object at which he aims there is some obstacle, which as yet is hidden from us; of this I am convinced. He knows something that we don't."

"But I will know!" exclaimed Raymond; "I will find out!"

"I shall not look for it," said the doctor, gaily, "for the obstacle, I am certain, is none other than Laurent Cornevin."

The conclusion was perhaps erroneous, but it was so logical that Raymond could not contradict it. "In that case," he said, "Combelaine is aware of the existence of Laurent and his presence in Paris."

"Perhaps," answered the doctor, slowly. And then, after a moment or two of reflection, he continued: "I am certain that Combelaine knows of the existence of some enemy, and a powerful one, too, who is lurking in ambush ready to profit by the slightest mistake he may make, to pounce upon him. Adventurers like himself, whose existence is a perpetual defiance to society, have always a sixth sense which warns them of danger. He has felt the earth tremble under his feet. This valet who has served him so long—who has been his confidant, and his accomplice in many of his infamous schemes—what has become of him? How could he leave a master who owed him so much money? Madame Misri herself could not understand it. Neither can I. And who is this Englishman who gave him such fabulous wages? May not this Englishman be a Frenchman like you and me? May he not have made a fortune in Australia? The letters that Madame Misri possessed have been stolen. By whom? It is by no means certain that it was by Combelaine. It seems to me that if he had these famous letters in his possession—these papers which are so compromising—he would never have tried to murder you, Raymond Delorge, the other night."

Raymond had been duped by all these hopes and illusions too often to be much exhilarated by his friend's words. "Do you mean to say"—he said speaking very slowly—"that you believe the person who carried off Flora Misri's papers to be Laurent Cornevin?"

"That is precisely what I mean."

"But how could he know of their existence? How——"

Dr. Legris stopped his friend with a gesture. "You forget," he said,

"this valet who possessed all Combeldaine's and Flora's secrets. This Leonard—do you think that it was only yesterday that he was bought by the Englishman whom I choose to call Laurent?"

Raymond was as if struck by lightning. "Merciful heavens?" he cried, "that would be indeed our salvation. Do you know, doctor, that Madame Misri told me that these papers would not only ruin Combeldaine, but also his accomplices Maumussy, Verdale, and the Princess d'Eljensen?" But a sudden reflection chilled his enthusiasm. "If Monsieur de Combeldaine knows nothing of Laurent's existence," he asked, "who can he suppose has taken the papers?"

"Why, you, of course!"

"That is to say, he believes me to be the inexorable enemy who crosses his path all the time, and defeats his combinations?"

"Precisely."

"Then this would explain the assassination?"

"And also why you are surrounded by spies, my dear friend, and why Laurent watches over you."

Thus it was that the doctor answered all the objections made to his theory.

"And yet," resumed Raymond, "one thing which passes my comprehension is, why Laurent should so persistently avoid me."

Legris smiled. "But I understand it very well," he replied. "Let us see. Has not Laurent every reason for turning the attention of these people, whom he wishes to attack, on you? If they believe you to be their only enemy, is he not free to carry out his plans. While they watch you, Laurent watches them. Were he to consent to see you, and to combine his plans with yours, twenty-four hours would not elapse before they discovered his identity."

Leaving Raymond to meditate on these words, Dr. Legris slowly drank a cup of tea, which had just been brought in by Krauss. After which, lighting another cigar, which he smoked contemplatively, he continued expounding his theories as follows:

"Now," he said, "let us look at our adventure in the cemetery. Let us try to find the author of that anonymous letter. Is it Combeldaine? No, certainly not. It was through a forgery that we entered the cemetery, and Combeldaine would not have been compelled to resort to any such means. With one word to the Prefect, he would have been able to obtain any permits he desired, and would not have used the forged ones which our guide had. The conclusion is therefore inevitable. It was Laurent Cornevin who wrote the letter, and it was one of his agents who joined us at La Reine-Blanche. But he left us most treacherously, you say? Certainly, and that was because Laurent was determined to avoid you."

"I see!"

"Now then, we have to ask who the people are that we saw climb over the cemetery wall and violate the tomb of Marie Sidonie. Were they Combeldaine's people? No; for it was clear they were in connivance with our guide. So the man, who appeared to us to be a man of the world, was an agent of Cornevin's, if not Cornevin himself."

Raymond caught his breath. "But the woman," he exclaimed, "who was the woman whom the others called 'Madame la Duchesse'?"

"I must confess," answered Legris, "that I did not recognize the Duchess de Maumussy; but, of course, this woman, who ever she was, disguised herself as far as in her power, for an expedition like that; so we have

no means of judging who she might be from her appearance. The next point is to ascertain the meaning of this scene, that escaped me utterly, and I am not ashamed to say so. I can discover nothing in your past which seems to have the smallest connection with this violation of a grave, and yet you were summoned in such a way that it is evident your presence was regarded as indispensable. Cornevin is not a man to take such a step without an adequate motive; for, as I said before, I feel certain that he was the author of the anonymous letter. Again: this letter said, 'Come for her sake, if not for your own.' The 'her' could, of course, only refer to Mademoiselle Simone. So the conclusion is inevitable that the woman we did not recognize was the Duchess de Maillefert."

Raymond's face lighted up with hope. Was Fate weary at last? he wondered. But the doctor was buried in thought, and his contracted brows indicated that his reflections were not altogether pleasing in character. "Softly—softly!" he said at last; "we won't shout victory just yet;" and as Raymond was about to speak, he added: "I see one black spot on the horizon. You are, I think you said, a member of a secret society?"

"Yes; and I was returning from one of its meetings when I was attacked."

"Precisely; and what did your friends think of the forged summons you had received?"

"It disturbed them very much."

"Do they know what happened to you on your return home?"

"I wrote to them the next day."

"And then?"

"Our chairman came to ask me all the particulars, which I gave, but without mentioning the name of De Maillefert, which would have been saying that I attributed the forgery to the Count de Combelaïne."

"And what did the chairman say?"

"That as it was a personal enmity he was reassured. Still to guard against the police having penetrated our secret, he had deemed it advisable to take immediate measures to change the place of meeting as well as the pass-words and signals."

"These people are simpletons," answered Legris impatiently. "Haven't they yet learned that these conspiracies are the very best traps which the government can possibly have for the people they find inconvenient? If the government had no other enemies than these it would last for centuries." Then suddenly he added: "And that, my dear fellow, is your great danger. Your secret society is Combelaïne's great weapon against you. As soon as he is ready to use it, he will."

"What can he do?"

"Only send you to Cayenne."

"True," answered Raymond. "But what can I do?"

"You can conceal yourself."

"My dear doctor!"

"It is the word that repels you. Call it disappearance, then, if you like that better, and do it to-night or to-morrow. What prevents you? Your mother? Not at all, for you have only to tell her that you believe the police to be on your track, and she will be the first to approve of your determination. How do you think Combelaïne would look if some fine morning his spies told him that Delorge had disappeared totally and entirely?"

"Concealment would mean condemning myself to utter powerlessness."

"What would you do if you did not conceal yourself?"

"I don't know; but it seems to me——"

"You are wrong. You can do literally nothing now. It is between Combelaïne and Cornevin that the struggle is now going on. Who will be the conqueror? I will bet on Cornevin. If he triumphs, the woman you love will be yours. But if he fails, believe me when I say that you would not have won."

Raymond still continued to urge further objections. "Were I to disappear now, I might hopelessly complicate Cornevin's plans," he said.

"I believe that you would, on the contrary, serve them. Don't you think that you are a fearful care to him? Don't you think that, knowing as he must, that your life is in constant danger, and that you have already once escaped an assassin's knife, he is absorbed, in trying to protect you?"

What was there to say to such reasoning as this?

"I would not hesitate," answered Raymond, "if the opinion we have was based on anything more than conjectures."

Legris stopped him. "Suppose I brought you," he said, "the undisputable proof that the papers stolen from Madame Misri are not in Combelaïne's hands?"

"Then it would be very different. But how could you do so?"

"There is a way, perhaps," answered the doctor. And after a little hesitation, he said, in a changed voice: "Once I was madly in love with a woman who turned out very badly. I had the strength to break with her but I have not had strength to forget her. A man does not tear a passion from his heart as he tears out a tooth. In spite of everything, I still feel, I shall always feel, the greatest interest in this poor creature, who has now become a celebrity in her wretched circle. I have watched her from afar, and she has become a great friend of Flora Misri. Through her we have a chance of getting at the truth."

"Oh! doctor," murmured Raymond.

"For a year it would have been a great act of imprudence on my part to face this woman," said the doctor. "I was not cured. But now I am sure of myself. To see her again will be a frightful shock to me. I know this, but I am willing to endure it. I think she will do what I ask. Tomorrow, before twelve o'clock, I will go to her and ask her to make Flora Misri talk."

II.

It was on the Boulevard Malesherbes, at the corner of the Rue de Surresnes, and two steps from the Champs Elysées, that the woman whom Dr. Legris had formerly loved, resided. She called herself Lucy Bergam. To say that the doctor's heart did not beat a little quicker when he was fairly on his way to her rooms, would not be true. But he had promised Raymond to go there. He fulfilled a duty, he thought, and one that was all the more sacred since he had told the entire truth to his friend. He had not said, however, this Lucy Bergam was precisely the famous actress who had cost the young Duke de Maillefert so much money.

"Madame Lucy Bergam," said the concierge of the house, "lives on the second floor, the first door on the right. But she is probably out at this time of day."

M. Legris climbed the stairs very slowly, summoning all his strength to control the evidence of any emotion. He rang two or three times before the door was opened, which was finally done, in the slow, cautious style which people who fear an incursion from an enemy are apt to adopt. A chamber-

maid, with a sly, impudent expression, thrust her head out and examined the doctor from head to foot. "What do you want?" she said,

"I wish to speak to Madame Bergam."

"She is out."

It was easy to see that the girl was lying, although she did so in a most facile manner. Dr. Legris did not argue the point, but simply took out his card-case. "Hand this card," he said, "to Madame Bergam. I will go away; but I shall go down the stairs so slowly that you can recall me, if she should desire to receive me."

He had not descended ten steps when the maid rushed after him: "Madame will see you, sir," she exclaimed.

He turned back, and was shown into a drawing-room which was furnished in the most detestable taste, crowded with ill-assorted articles, some of them very valuable, and others simply ridiculous. However, this did not astonish the doctor; but he was surprised to see signs of a sudden departure scattered round the room. There were two huge trunks half-packed, and several bags and bonnet-boxes standing round about. On the tables, chairs, and floor lay a profusion of articles of clothing—cashmere shawls and linen, dresses, bonnets, petticoats—in fact, all that prodigious accumulation of raiment which a fashionable woman feels called on to drag about with her.

However, before Dr. Legris had time to reflect, a door was thrown open and Madame Lucy Bergam appeared wrapped in a once superb dressing-gown which was now tumbled and dirty, and with her hair streaming over her shoulders.

"Valentin!" she cried, as she advanced with open arms.

But the doctor drew back and said, coldly, "Yes—it is I."

He felt none of the emotion he had feared, and he knew that all was over, and that Madame Lucy could disturb him no more.

"I knew you had not forgotten me," she continued, breathlessly, "and that you would come to me if I were in trouble."

"Are you in trouble?" he asked.

She seemed to be utterly astonished. "What!" she exclaimed; "didn't you know it?"

"I know nothing."

"Why! all Paris is talking about it. The papers are full of it. Philippe is in prison."

The doctor started. "Philippe," he repeated, "Do you mean the young Duke de Maillefert?"

"Yes, he was arrested at five o'clock yesterday evening. We had gone to dine, together, with some of his friends, at the Café Anglais, when two gentlemen suddenly appeared and asked to see the duke for a moment. It was a nice moment, indeed, for as soon as they were shown into the room, they exclaimed—'Sir, we arrest you in the name of the law!'"

"It's most extraordinary," muttered the doctor.

"Had I been in Philippe's place," continued Madame Bergam, "I should have let these men know that a duke could not be arrested with impunity. But he was as meek as a lamb. He turned deadly pale and trembled so much that I really thought he would fall. He rolled his eyes about as he declared, over and over again, 'There is some mistake. I give you my word there is some mistake!' However, the others said they knew very well what they were about, and they had a warrant, and indeed they even showed it to him."

"And then he followed them?"

"Not immediately. He first asked for a vehicle. They said there was one at the door. He next asked permission to write some letters. They replied that their orders were that he should communicate with no one. He then said, 'Very well—let us go.' And they went off; but as Philippe reached the landing he turned and came to me, and whispered in my ear: 'Go and see Verdale and Combelaïne at once, and tell them that I consent to everything.'"

"To everything! To what?"

"Ah! I don't know."

"And you did as he told you?"

"I tried to do so; but I could not find M. de Combelaïne, and when I went to see Verdale there was no one there but his son, who received me as if I had come out of the gutter."

Dr. Legris was more and more astonished. All his previous ideas and theories were totally upset by this new and most extraordinary incident.

"But why was M. Philippe de Maillefert arrested?" he asked.

"I know no more about it than you," rejoined the young woman, "but there are some particulars in one of the newspapers. Wait a moment till I find it."

She looked about and finally discovered the paper she was in search of, and the doctor then read aloud the paragraph she pointed out to him:—"Yesterday at the Bourse a rumour was in circulation of the arrest of one of our most conspicuous young noblemen, one who has already been celebrated for his constant ill-luck at the gambling-table and his falls upon the turf. Incredible as the rumour at first appeared, it was soon ascertained to be true, and we have been to obtain the following information, which we lay before our readers:—The young Duke de M—— was arrested at the house of a person of his acquaintance, and immediately taken before the investigating magistrate, M. Barban d'Avranchel, to whom the management of the affair is confided. Subsequently he was removed to the prison of the Conciergerie, where he still remains in custody."

"A person of his acquaintance, indeed!" grumbled Madame Bergam greatly offended. "They mean me of course, although he was not arrested at my house, and I think it would have been much better to have said so."

However, the doctor went on: "The young duke, it would appear has lately been the chairman of an important financial company, and we are assured that he has been guilty of some great irregularities, or if he has not himself committed them, he has allowed others to do so. However we will abstain to-day from repeating any of the stories in circulation; and our readers will naturally understand our reserve. We prefer to appear less well-informed than our contemporaries rather than add to the grief of a great family, by propagating a report which we trust may yet prove to be a mere misunderstanding."

"What an extraordinary thing!" muttered the doctor, as he slowly read this paragraph over again, trying to find out if there were nothing between the lines, and paying little or no attention to Madame Bergam, who was giving vent to a steady stream of words, expressive of her grief and anger.

"This is just my luck," she sighed. "Such things never happen to any one but me. Philippe arrested! And at what a time—just as I find myself in a dreadful fix, utterly overwhelmed with debts and without a sou. Philippe had paid no one for months, and has kept on saying to his creditors that before three months, he would be in possession of millions!"

At this moment the noise of a loud discussion was heard in the ante-room. "What can that be!" she asked, impatiently, and with heightened colour.

She was about to ring, when the impudent-looking maid appeared, and, in a sulky tone, exclaimed: "It's Monsieur Grollet."

"The livery stable-keeper?"

"Yes."

"Tell him to call again."

"Tell him so yourself, then, madame; for I can't."

Madame Bergam stamped her foot angrily.

"Bid him come in then."

Dr. Legris sheltered himself behind the newspaper. This name of Grollet had startled him, for was it not that of the groom at the Elysée Palace, who had been so audaciously substituted for Laurent Cornevin, and whose false swearing before M. Barban d'Avranchel had contributed to save De Combelaïne?

Grollet came in and looked the very type of a prosperous horsey character—impudent and swaggering—a gold chain dangling from his waistcoat, and his hat on his head.

"What, is it you, M. Grollet," began Madame Lucy, in most dulcet tones, "who has come to torment me?"

"I need my money."

"Don't you know what has happened to me?"

"Monsieur de Maillefert in prison, do you mean?"

"Precisely."

The man gesticulated vehemently, as he said: "My money is lost, then, I suppose! Confound all these nobles! they are greater cheats and swindlers than any others. But I won't stand it, and you will please understand that it is no use to send to me for carriages any more, for you won't have them!"

He swore and raved, but somehow his anger did not strike Dr. Legris as altogether sincere.

"Dear M. Grollet!" supplicated Madame Lucy.

"What is it?"

"You will surely let me have a single horse-brougham with——?"

"Pay me some money on account then."

"Alas, I can't!"

"Then you will have no carriages."

"But what shall I do?"

"Do," sneered Grollet—"you will do like honest women. You will have to go about in omnibuses."

Madame Lucy looked at the doctor imploringly. Perhaps she vaguely hoped that he would take some bank-notes from his pocket and relieve her feelings by throwing them in the man's face. But in that case she was mistaken.

Dr. Legris only had eyes for Grollet. It struck him as very extraordinary that this man, whose establishment was one of the best known and most lucrative in Paris, should come in person to make a scene—a disagreeable proceeding which is usually left to a subordinate or a lawyer. Was he not obeying orders?

"Very well," replied Madame Lucy, tired of waiting for some interference from the doctor; "I will go about in omnibuses, then. Only don't be uneasy—I will pay you sooner or later."

"Take your time," replied the man roughly; "only if you don't pay me I shall seize your furniture." And thereupon he went off.

Madame Bergam seemed inclined to have a fit of hysterics. "Just think of it," she sobbed; "as soon as these people know you to be in trouble, they fall on you tooth and nail. Upholsterer, milliner, and dressmaker, they have come in steady procession ever since the morning. I shall be arrested for debt, I'm sure of it. Oh! if Philippe were only here! But if ever he comes out of prison he shall pay me for this! The idea of leaving a woman in such a position!"

It was not only on Philippe's head that Madame Lucy poured out her anathemas; a considerable proportion of them were directed to the doctor, who had not interfered. But he was determined not to understand her, and so with the most careless air in the world, he said: "Then it is this fracas that causes your departure?"

"What departure?"

With a gesture he pointed to the disordered room, the trunks and bags.

"True," replied the young woman, "true! I forgot. Unfortunately, it isn't I who am going. I have a great many beautiful things—cashmeres, worth a thousand crowns a piece, laces at twenty-five louis a yard, and diamonds valued at more than a hundred thousand francs. But my furniture is not entirely paid for, so that I have nothing to depend upon but my clothes and jewellery. And the brigands will take them from me! They will say that I have ruined Philippe, and I shall have to let them say so, because it is somewhat flattering, after all. But just look at it yourself. How can I ruin a man who has nothing? Philippe has'n't a farthing; we have been living on credit everywhere. He told me that, the day after his sister's marriage we should roll in gold. Only his sister doesn't seem inclined to marry, and I am left in the lurch like this, and expected to keep his creditors at bay. Ah; if I had only known, I should have remained a shop girl in the Faubourg Saint-Jacques."

Perhaps there was some truth in what she said. Perhaps Dr. Legris was more cruelly avenged than he dreamed. But what did it matter to him now?

"Do you mean," he asked, "that all these things lying about here are not yours?"

"No, indeed—they don't belong to me. They belong to Flora Misri, a friend of mine, who has been hiding here with me for nearly a fortnight."

The doctor's eyes gleamed. "Hiding? Why, what was the poor woman afraid of?"

"Of Combelaïne. Ah! if she had only believed me. But no, the man has bewitched her. She is really afraid to go to her own rooms. All those things you see there were fetched piece by piece, by my maid. She, who was once so covetous and suspicious, now trusts her keys, and even those of her secretaire to the first comer. We were just going to pack her trunks when you came in. She intends to go off to England this very night, and thence to America."

No one knew better than Dr. Legris how much reliance could be placed in this woman's statements, but he smiled doubtfully. "A pretty story," he said, cheerfully, "a capital one!"

He wished to pique Madame Bergam, and he succeeded the more easily as she thought that he doubted the reality of her distress.

"You think I am lying," she cried; "well, wait a bit, you shall see for yourself." So saying she opened a door and called out: "Flora! Flora!"

Madame Misri instantly appeared. Her pallor and the circles round her eyes showed how little she had slept, as did her nervous, frightened glance and fluttering hands. There was no mistaking her age now. However, the doctor went towards her and abruptly said: "Madame, I am the intimate friend of M. Raymond Delorge."

A faint colour rose to Madame Misri's face. "M. Delorge has behaved," she said, "in the most dishonourable way. I had the weakness to reveal to him the existence of certain papers, and he profited by this knowledge to enter my rooms and steal them."

She evidently believed what she said.

"You are mistaken, madame," answered the doctor; "I swear to you that my friend never touched your papers."

"Who did then?"

"The one person who had the greatest interest in taking them—the Count de Combelaïne."

Madame Bergam listened in astonishment to this conversation, and began to suspect that Dr. Legris had not come for her sake after all.

"No, it was not Combelaïne who robbed me," said Madame Misri.

"How do you know?" asked the doctor.

"He told me so."

"Did he never lie to you?"

She shivered at some recollection, and then eagerly added: "At all events, he did not lie on this occasion. On the day after I had met Monsieur Delorge, in despair at what I had done, I came here to pass the night on a sofa."

"Yes," interposed her friend, "that's true."

"At eight o'clock in the morning I sent for a cab and drove home. I had decided on what I would do. I had resolved to give Victor back all his papers without any conditions whatever. I opened my secretaire for them, and they were gone! I questioned my servants. They had seen and heard nothing. I lost my head, and I don't know what I did. My sister came in the midst of all the hubbub. I really think I was crazy."

"That was what Madame Cornevin said," interrupted the doctor.

"My sister had just gone," continued Madame Flora, "when Victor appeared. He knew of my leaving his house with young Delorge, and he was furious. He shut the door of my room, and locked it behind him. 'Now then,' he said, 'give me those papers this moment.' I had hoped till then that it was he who had them. 'But you know,' I said, 'that I have not got them any longer!' At this he became absolutely livid, and without one word he darted to my secret drawer, where he supposed I kept them. But they were not there. 'Ah! miserable woman,' he cried, 'you have sold them to the son of General Delorge!' He looked so awful that I fell on my knees, and swore to him that I had not done so. But he would not listen to me. He caught me by the throat. 'You will see,' he cried, 'how I treat traitors!' And he would certainly have killed me, if one of my servants, hearing my cries, had not burst the door open and saved my life."

It was with the greatest difficulty that Dr. Legris concealed the immense satisfaction he felt on hearing all this. "And after that?" he asked.

"After that, I thought Victor would go crazy with rage. 'I have not succeeded this time,' he said, setting his teeth, 'but your hour will come.' Then, before going away, he added: 'Your friends, Raymond Delorge, and all the scoundrels who have paid you for your infernal treason are no doubt

triumphant. But they crow too soon. I am possibly lost; but they are not saved, and I don't intend to perish alone. They don't know what a man like myself can do when he is pushed to extremities.' I tried to undeceive him—I tried to convince him that I had been a victim, as well as himself. But he would not listen. 'Go and find your Delorge,' he said, with a sneer 'and let him protect you, if he can!' and then he went away."

She stopped. She was in such a pitiful state that Madame Lucy, whose tears were always ready to flow, now began to weep. "Poor Flora!" she sobbed.

However, Madame Misri continued: "When Victor had gone I fell on the floor unconscious. When I recovered myself I found Dr. Buiron leaning over me. You know him, perhaps?"

Yes, M. Legris knew him. Dr. Buiron was the very physician who, eighteen years before, had been called to the Elysée to see General Delorge, when he was already stiff and cold. "M. Buiron is a fellow practitioner," said Raymond's friend simply.

"He is a very sagacious man," rejoined Madame Flora, "as is proved by the fact that he is rich, both in purse and honours. And yet, when my eyes met his, I shuddered with horror, for I knew this Dr. Buiron; he often came to pass the evening with Victor. There was a letter from him among the papers which were stolen. So my first idea was: 'This man has come to poison me!'"

Poor Madame Misri! Big tears rolled down her pale cheeks. "I knew very well," she sobbed, "that it would be a very easy thing to get rid of me, and that it would be a crime unattended by much risk. Who would take any trouble about a woman like myself? Men ruin themselves for us—they give us diamonds and flatter us; but when it comes to anything more, they give us the cold shoulder and pass on."

Dr. Legris watched Madame Bergam out of the corners of his eyes. She sat pale and trembling, struck dumb by the despair of this woman whose life she had thought so enviable. "Of course," continued Madame Misri, "I did not allow Dr. Buiron to perceive my suspicions. 'If he realizes that I distrust him,' I said to myself, 'my life would not be worth a moment's purchase!' So I thanked him, and promised to follow all his prescriptions with the utmost fidelity. But as soon as he had gone, I threw everything he had sent me from the chemist's away, and then I came here. I knew that Lucy had a good heart, and that she would never abandon a friend in trouble, nor betray me, even if they offered her my weight in gold."

"I would die sooner than betray a friend," interrupted Madame Bergam.

"I know that," continued Flora. "I know that very well. Poor darling, I have bored you to death, and given you no end of trouble; but I will show you that I am not ungrateful."

"I ask for nothing, Flora."

"No, but I shall not forget what I owe you, all the same. You are in trouble, and your creditors take advantage of the duke's arrest to worry you. But I am here. I don't choose that my friend Lucy should be arrested, nor that they should make her cry. I have money of my own, and you shall have enough from me, as a gift, to get clear of your creditors."

With one common impulse the women rose and embraced each other with an effusion which would have touched the doctor if he had not under-

stood the true sense of this touching scene. It was now quite clear that Madame Bergam had fully intended to utilize her friend's secrets, and it was equally evident that Madame Flora's sudden and unexpected outburst of generosity was intended to prevent any treason.

As soon as Madame Misri was seated again, the doctor asked: "And now, my dear madame, would it be an indiscretion on my part if I were to ask what you propose to do?"

She looked at him suspiciously. "I have not yet decided," she answered.

The doctor touched one of her trunks with his foot. "I thought you were about to start on a long journey," he said.

"Perhaps."

He expected this cautious reserve. "I am unknown to you, madame——" he began.

But Madame Bergam interrupted him.

"Oh! you may speak out before Valentin," she cried. "I will answer for him."

"I trust, madame, that you will not continue to distrust me when you remember that I am the intimate friend of Raymond Delorge."

"Yes, I forgot—you are his friend."

"His most intimate friend," answered the doctor—"which is to say that our interests, fears, and hopes are one and the same."

At this moment he was interrupted by a great noise of doors, and by a voice in the anteroom, shouting in an angry tone: "I tell you she is here, and I bid you go and tell her that Baron Verdale wishes to see her."

On hearing this name, Flora Misri turned deadly pale. "Verdale!" she gasped. "Victor has sent him—and I am lost!"

To judge what Combelaïne was capable of, it was only necessary to note the terror of this poor woman, who knew him so well. "You have nothing to fear, madame," said the doctor; "at least not while I am here."

"Can you not hide her somewhere?" proposed Madame Lucy, eager to serve the friend who had come to her rescue financially. And so saying she opened the door of her sleeping-room. "Go in there," she added, "this gentleman and I will receive your visitor for you."

It was time indeed for, indignant at the obstinate resistance of the servant, Baron Verdale pushed his way past her into the room.

He was the same man as of old, with all the intolerable insolence of a *parvenu*. He was redder than usual, too. Without noticing the doctor, who had retired into a corner, he exclaimed, addressing Lucy: "I knew very well you were at home. What by Jupiter do you mean by shutting yourself up in this way so that people can't get at you?"

"Then you wish to speak to me, sir?"

"Of course I do."

Then it was not for Madame Misri he came, and the luckless woman who heard this in the next room now breathed more freely.

Without deigning to sit down, and in the same rude manner, the architect exclaimed: "You called on me last evening?"

"Yes, sir, I did."

"And as I was absent you asked to see my son?"

"Not at all—your servant showed me into the room where a young man was."

"Very well, that young man was my son."

A little shrug of Madame Lucy's shoulders was her sole reply.

Verdale's ill humour increased. "Do you know," he said, "that it was a most underhand way of getting into a house to tell tales?"

"Sir——!"

Although Madame Lucy was not in the habit of being treated with exaggerated respect, she was not disposed to submit to this sort of thing. "I am not in the habit of telling tales, sir," she replied, drawing herself up haughtily.

"But at all events you did so. What did you mean by talking to my son? When I came in I found him as disagreeable as possible."

It was evident to Dr. Legris that M. Verdale, like many other fathers of the same stamp and style, had found a most inconvenient censor in his son.

"I told him nothing at all," rejoined Madame Lucy. "The young man, who was anything but civil, did not even give me time to repeat what Philippe had told me to say to M. de Combeldaine and yourself. That is, the duke told me to tell you that he consented to everything."

"Upon my word! Does he, indeed! And when did he intrust you with this commission?"

"When he was arrested."

Verdale made an impatient gesture, and rejoined: "Then the story is true, which I read in the papers this morning about the arrest?"

"Most true, unfortunately. But haven't you seen Monsieur de Combeldaine?"

"Combeldaine! Does one ever see him? Does one ever hear him? Does one ever know what he is manouevring for?"

The angry blood rose to the architect's face. He forgot that he was not alone. "He is in hiding," he said; "and it is as well he should be, after what he has done. The idea of arresting the Duke de Maillefert! Was there ever such folly seen—to attract inquisitive eyes to our affairs? How can he now expect to stop these investigations just when and where he pleases? I have only just got what I deserved, for I knew De Combeldaine thoroughly. Don't I know that he would burn down the house of his best friend to warm water for a foot-bath for himself? To think of his not warning me—of his saying nothing to me—of exposing me to this sort of thing!"

If Dr. Legris had had any further doubts, they would have been removed by this explosion. An audacious inspiration came to him. He approached Verdale, and said, in an easy tone: "Perhaps you would not blame M. de Combeldaine so much if you knew the reasons of his conduct."

It was with a look of consternation that the architect now eyed this stranger, whom he had not at first perceived, and who struck him as having risen through the floor. He choked a bit, and then remarked: "You know these reasons, then, sir, do you?"

"I think I know them."

"Ah!"

"An accident has happened to M. de Combeldaine."

"An accident?"

"Yes; or call it an annoyance, if you like—and this hastened his resolutions. M. de Combeldaine is a prudent man, and he knows that he must take fortune at its highest tide now. He had collected and placed, in what he considered a very safe place, a quantity of documents which seriously compromised his very best friends—all people of influence and fortune. These papers were intended, as one may say, to provide for his old age."

The architect became impatient: "To the point, sir, if you please."

"Well, sir, M. de Combeldaine no longer has these precious documents."

"Do you mean those papers he was foolish enough to trust to Flora?"

"They have been stolen."

The color faded from Verdale's face. "I knew that would happen," he said, in a tone of consternation. "Yes, I foresaw it. The day that Flora Misri first threatened us with those papers, I said to Combeldaine, 'Take care! Take care!' But he laughed in my face. Flora, in his opinion, was his property, who would think, feel, and act according to his bidding, and he had nothing to fear from her; but this is the end of it!"

He relapsed into silence, probably measuring the extent of his peril; then, addressing the doctor, he said: "Have you any idea who could have stolen these papers?"

This question was just what the doctor anticipated, and he flattered himself that his reply would serve Cornevin. "It is supposed they were carried off by young Delorge."

"The son of General Delorge?"

"Precisely."

"But for what object?"

"To prevent Mademoiselle de Maillefert from marrying M. de Combeldaine."

"M. Delorge cannot do that," Verdale replied.

"Who knows?"

"I assure you that is impossible. As for Flora, she won't enjoy her treachery, I fancy, without some alloy. And I bid you both good morning."

And, thereupon he went off without having once lifted his hat from his head and shrugging his shoulders as if he reproached himself for taking the trouble to waste his precious time about such frivolous matters.

"He is in a nice temper!" cried Madame Bergam, "and I am inclined to believe there will be a famous scene between him and Combeldaine;" and at the thought she laughed with glee. "The result will be Philippe's release," she continued. "Poor boy! He is too stupid to be a rascal."

She could not continue, for Madame Flora now came out of the room where she had taken refuge on Verdale's arrival. She had knelt with her ear at the keyhole, and had not lost one word of the conversation. "You see," she said to the doctor, "you deceived me, for it was M. Delorge who took the papers."

"Excuse me——"

"You have just told M. Verdale that it was he who took them."

"No, madame."

"You did—I heard you."

"Not precisely; but I wished him to think so, that I admit, for I had my reasons."

She interrupted him in a violent tone! "That is to say, you betray me, too, as all the others have done!"

To dispute with a woman, whose brain is disturbed by anger and fear, is to lose one's time. But Dr. Legris had determined to conquer Madame Flora. So arming himself, with patience, he replied: "Think of what you are saying. How could I betray you? Why should I betray you? For the advantage of De Combeldaine, who is our mortal enemy, who has already assassinated Raymond's father, and who now wishes to rob him of the woman he loves and who loves him? That's foolish. You ought to know that."

Whether she realized it or not, was not certain. At all events, her features softened.

"Your life is threatened by De Combelaine," continued the doctor, who warmed up to his work. "Between himself and you there is a contest which will, and must last, until one of you shuffles off this mortal coil. This is also precisely my friend's situation. So you and Raymond, whose interests and views are so similar, ought to act together, and aid each other."

"That's true," murmured Madame Misri—"that's true, but——"

"You complain of having no allies and friends. Whose fault is it? You are in a state of indecision between the man whom you have every reason to fear, and the man from whom you have so much to hope. For Heaven's sake take one side or the other."

Madame Lucy here spoke, with a little sneer. "You are losing your time, my dear," she said to the doctor. "Flora will promise all you ask; and your back will no sooner be turned, than she will write to Combelaine to tell him everything and implore his pardon."

She did not believe one word she said; but she had reflected a great deal during Verdale's visit, and she saw that it was to her interest to declare herself against the people who had arrested Philippe, in order, as she believed, to get hold of his millions—those millions respecting which she had herself formed many agreeable plans. Her raillery, she thought, would be the stinging lash which would decide her friend; and she was not mistaken.

Madame Misri started up with blazing cheeks and flashing eyes; and, in a tone of the fiercest hatred, she exclaimed: "I have been base and cowardly in the past, but that is gone by now. So long as Victor lives I shall tremble for my life. If I knew what words to utter in order to send him to the scaffold, my lips should speak them within the hour." And so saying, she extended her hand to the doctor. "I am with you, sir—with M. Delorge—with my sister. You may rely on me. What do you want of me? Speak!"

A smile of triumph passed over the doctor's lips. "Before anything else," he began, "I should like to know your plans."

"I intend to leave Paris to night, sir."

"Leave Paris? But where would you be any safer?"

"I must go to some place where Combelaine will not follow me; or, rather, where he won't know I am."

"That is to say, you wish him to lose all trace of you—you hope to escape from the spies which you consider are now around you?"

"I hope so; for all my plans are laid, and my measures are taken with that object. Judge for yourself; my preparations for departure are nearly completed. To night, at eight o'clock, I shall send for a cab on which my luggage will be placed. This cab will convey my dear Lucy and her maid Ernestine, dressed in such a way that the latter will be taken for me, to the Western Railway station, where Ernestine will procure a ticket for London, where she will await my orders at a hotel agreed upon. In the meantime, I shall dress in Ernestine's clothes and go down and see the concierge; I shall offer him ten, twenty, a hundred louis, if it be necessary, to give me the means of climbing over the wall which separates the court-yard of this house from the next one, the entrance of which is in the Rue de Suresnes. Will the concierge refuse? I think not. I shall climb this wall, and shall then be in the street, wearing a servant's costume and carrying a large wicker basket. I shall take the first cab I see, and arrive at the Montparnasse station in time to catch the train for Brest. Thence I go to New York by a steamer, on which my passage is taken under a false name, thanks to

a passport procured for me by M. Coutanceau. Once in America I shall communicate with Ernestine, and have my trunks sent to me without allowing her, however, to suspect where I am. If I cannot do this, that is to say if I lose my trunks, it can't be helped, that's all. Coutanceau will watch over all my interests here. When he came to see me on the day before yesterday I gave him a full power of attorney."

Never did a woman's face express more astonishment and disgust than Madame Lucy's. "Do you mean, Flora," she cried, "that you have arranged this programme yourself?"

"Yes, with Coutanceau's help."

"And you never said a word about it to me!"

"What was the good? Am I not sure of you? Would you refuse a service to a friend, who will release you from all embarrassment, before she leaves?"

"Of course not."

"And would Ernestine hesitate to go to London if I gave her five or six thousand louis?"

"Ernestine would go round the world for that."

"You see, then, that I have foreseen everything," said Madame Flora. And repressing a shiver, she added. "After all, it makes one rather ingenious when one is fighting for life."

She was right. Her plan, moreover, was simple enough and sufficiently well conceived to have ninety-nine chances out of a hundred of success. But in Dr. Legris' eyes it was totally wrong, for he meant to keep Madame Misri within reach, just as one keeps a loaded pistol. "And so madame," he said, "you would desert us at a most critical moment?"

"I would, indeed."

"Is this very—generous?"

"Perhaps not," answered Madame Flora, with the cynical frankness imparted by fear; "but, after all, in this world, every one for oneself. I can't live here; Combelaïne told me that he had doomed me, and I know very well what that means, for I have heard him use that expression of three persons, and in less than a month they were carried to the cemetery."

The doctor saw that he had made a mistake, so he ceased to argue the point. "Go, then, dear madame," he said; "only I——"

"Only what?"

"Only that I believe Paris to be the only city where you can live in security. Here you might escape De Combelaïne's spies, who will follow Ernestine, to be sure, when they take her for you; but in twenty-four hours they will have discovered their error, and before two days are over they will be on your track. When you arrive in America one of Combelaïne's agents who has been warned by cable, will be at the docks."

Poor Flora grew deadly pale. "Oh!" she said, faintly.

Sure of having touched her now, the doctor went on coldly: "America is a great and powerful land, but the people are peculiar. They respect liberty, even to excess. They would never tolerate such a police as ours, whose paternal solicitude is carried to excess."

"You mean, then——"

"I mean that if I were desirous of getting rid of an enemy, I should try and induce him to go to America."

Resolved to serve Dr. Legris' cause, Madame Lucy now interfered. "Ah! dear Flora," she cried, "listen to Valentin. Don't go to that horrible country."

Madame Misri's pale face was expressive of perplexity. "What would you advise me to do, then?" she asked the doctor.

"Remain in Paris."

"But I should die of fear and——"

Legris interrupted her. "I don't advise you to remain here openly."

"Ah!"

"I will agree to hide you."

"Alas! and how?"

"In the most simple way. Execute your plan to a certain extent. The first part of it is excellent. Ernestine will go to London, and you, dear madame, will climb your wall. Only, instead of taking the first cab you meet in the Rue de Suresnes, you will go straight to a vehicle where a friend is waiting for you. This friend, who is wise and prudent, will have prepared a safe retreat for you, he will take you there, and you can wait the progress of events patiently."

"And you think——"

"I think nothing—I am certain that this would be far better."

Madame Misri reflected. "But where," she said; "am I to find a devoted friend?"

"You have me, madame, and I am ready to save you."

"Ah! Flora, were I in your place I shouldn't hesitate," said Madame Lucy.

However, Madame Misri continued to weep silently, and the doctor was arming himself with new arguments, when all at once she exclaimed: "Well, you may expect me to-night in the Rue de Suresnes."

"This evening! no; for I wish to prepare a place of safety for you. You had better say to-morrow."

But she was firm. "No; to-night—and now, the hour?"

"I will be in a cab at eight o'clock, opposite number 20. So that you may run no risk of a mistake, the corner of a white handkerchief will hang out of the window of the cab."

"It is understood then, sir, that I confide myself entirely to you?"

"You shall never have occasion to repent of your confidence, I swear it to you, madame."

When Dr. Legris retired shortly afterwards, Madame Lucy went to the door with him, and on reaching the ante-room she laid her hand on his arm. "And so," she said, "it was not for me that you came."

"I admit it," he answered, with a smile.

She sighed, and in a husky voice she said, "You have forgotten me, then? and yet——" He did not reply. "All right," she said; "it is better as it is—particularly for you. But we remain friends, do we not? You see that my sympathies are on your side. Adieu!"

III.

As he went down the stairs Dr. Legris said to himself:

"Yes—it is indeed better for me!"

And yet it was not without a certain surprise that he found his heart so light and untroubled. It was, indeed, all over. He had been totally unmoved by the voice and the eyes of Madame Lucy. His only sensation had been a sort of shame that he had ever loved her. The prism was broken, and he saw her as she really was—beautiful, to be sure, but silly, common-

place and vulgar—perverse, heartless and unscrupulous. "And this is the end," he said, "of a passion which I believed would be life-long."

But it was neither the place nor the hour to philosophise, and as he could see no cabs in the neighbourhood, he hurried off on foot, eagerly anticipating the effect of the good news he was taking to Raymond. He knew that he had a great deal to tell, and he felt that the result of his visit to Madame Bergam would be enormous. He had proved to his own satisfaction that no one but Laurent Cornevin could have carried away Flora's papers, and he said to himself that a man possessing such weapons should be invincible. Then was it not a wise plan to induce Madame Misri to remain in Paris? It certainly was; but still he was somewhat embarrassed to keep his promise to find a safe retreat for her.

He remembered among his clients, however, the widow of an officer of engineers, to whom he had rendered one of those services which can never be forgotten. This woman was past middle age, intelligent and energetic, and lived in a little house at Batignolles. It was there he decided to take Madame Misri, feeling certain that no person would ever go there to look for her. And the widow was precisely the person to sustain, encourage, and forbid imprudence on the part of a woman like Flora.

As deeply interested as if he were pursuing his own affairs rather than those of a friend of a fortnight's standing, M. Legris followed the steep ascent of the Rue Blanche. Just as he passed the Rue Moncey he heard himself called by name. "Dr. Legris! doctor!"

It was old Krauss who came towards him with despairing gestures. "What is the matter?" asked Dr. Legris.

"A great misfortune," answered the old soldier. "M. Raymond was dressing to go out after breakfast when a gentleman called to see him. I have seen this gentleman before—that is, he has been at the house. He looked pale and frightened. I showed him into my master's study, but he did not stay more than five minutes, and then went away in great haste. Monsieur Raymond next told his mother and me that a secret society, of which he was a member, had been discovered; that the lists of members were seized, and many members already arrested. Oh! sir, what a woman my mistress is! She didn't lose time in lamenting, but simply said, 'Very well; you must fly. Conceal yourself in Belgium. Fortunately I have three or four thousand francs on hand. Take them, and go at once.'"

"And he has gone?"

"Yes, sir; but before he left he bade me search for you, and prevent you from going near the house, which is watched. I was to tell you that he wished to speak to you, and would wait at the *café* where you took such good care of him—the *Café de Périclès*."

Dr. Legris had predicted all this, and it needed but small foresight to do so, inasmuch as this complication was the natural sequence of the forged summons sent to Raymond as coming from the Society of the Friends of Justice. Having a weapon ready at hand, De Combelaïne used it. Nothing could have been more simple. The only thing singular about the transaction was that this blow had been so long in coming. Why had Raymond not been arrested at the outset?

"I really cannot understand that," muttered M. Legris.

"That is precisely what M. Raymond said when he left the house," Krauss replied.

"How long ago was that?"

"About an hour. You will go and meet him at once, will you not, sir?"

"Yes, at once."

The old soldier's voice trembled. "Then tell him, I beg of you, to keep his eyes open. Tell him to distrust his own shadow. With cowards and assassins there's no disgrace in being prudent."

"You may rely on me, my good Krauss," answered the doctor. And after pressing the hand of the faithful servant, he, instead of following the Rue Blanche, turned into the Rue Boursault, in order to reach the outer boulevard more quickly.

He hurried along with considerable apprehension. Might not Raymond be arrested already? "What utter folly!" he muttered, "to appoint such a well-known place to meet me as the Café de Périclès, which is known, too, as a place where he often goes."

However, he reached the café, which, as usual at this hour, was quiet and almost deserted. Three persons were there—two artists, who were playing at billiards, and the journalist Peyrolas, who, seated at a table, with his ink-bottle beside him, wrote on in a sort of rage. "No Raymond!" said the doctor to himself, turning pale.

Softly as he entered, the furious journalist looked up. "Doctor," he cried, "come here!" And as the doctor meekly obeyed, the journalist continued—"I have written two articles which will make a great stir. I risk having the paper suppressed. I know it, and my liberty is at stake; but no matter! I shall have at least the consciousness of having raised my voice when fear closed all other lips!"

"But what has gone wrong?" asked Dr. Legris, in an absent sort of way.

"The journals announce the discovery of a grand conspiracy."

Legris started. "Does it concern the Friends of Justice?"

"Precisely. There have been fifty arrests already, while to-morrow there will be a thousand. Before the end of the week five hundred citizens will be sent to Cayenne, under the fallacious pretext that they have attempted to disturb order and peace. Do you know, doctor, what I have written, and what I intend to print?" He struck his breast as he spoke. "I intend," he cried, "to prove that this plot never existed—that there has never been any such society, that it is the grossest invention of the police, an abject machination, and an ignoble trap."

The doctor was on thorns. "I must leave you," he said, to the foaming penman, who, however, was not so easily disposed of.

"One moment. I have kept the best till the end. Have you heard nothing of yesterday's scandal?"

"What scandal?"

"Ah! doctor, what hospital do you come from? Are you really ignorant of the fact that the Duke de Maillefert, a real *bona fide* duke, has been arrested?"

Although he wrote the hottest, maddest articles, M. Peyrolas had certain qualities which made him valuable in his line. His facts were usually authentic, as Legris was well aware. So he controlled every sign of anxiety, and quietly asked: "Have you the details?"

The journalist threw back his head haughtily. "Who should have them but me? I have pumped the concierge at the Maillefert mansion, the concierge at the house where a certain actress resides, two employes of the Rural Bank Company, and the cashier at Verdale's. I can even give you the *menu* of the duke's dinner in prison."

"I assure you that I don't care for it," protested the doctor. "I simply

wished to know how a nobleman like the Duke de Maillefert could be mixed up with these rascally financial operations."

Peyrolas pulled up his shirt-collar with an air of importance. "Really, nothing can be more simple," he said, "for a year or two the duke has traded on his ancestors. He was well known at the Bourse. Whoever wanted a high-sounding name on a prospectus knew where to find one, but they had to pay for it, as they would for any article of merchandize. After breathing the fumes of all these financial cook-shops, our young friend took a notion of putting his own hand to the sauce. So one fine morning he joined a company, organized by a cunning rascal whom I have heard you speak of, a certain Baron Verdale, who is about as much of a baron as that waiter is in the corner."

Dr. Legris expected to hear this name. "And then?" he asked.

"Then, when De Maillefert saw that the strong-box was pretty full, he said to himself, 'This money ought to belong to me'—and, to be brief, he employed these funds precisely as he might have done had they been his own."

"But how was the discovery made?"

"In pretty much the same style, I fancy, as all thefts are discovered. Verdale cried out, 'Where is the money?' and as the duke was the only person who could possibly have taken it, he filed a complaint against the young nobleman."

To reconcile this statement and Verdale's surprise at Madame Lucy's was difficult. "Are you sure of what you say, my dear Peyrolas?" asked the doctor.

"Sure? I tell you I have interviewed Verdale's cashier, and have my information from him."

"And haven't you heard that De Combelaïne was mixed up in the affair?"

The journalist seemed much astonished. "De Combelaïne!" he repeated. "No, I haven't heard his name, and I really don't see——" But he checked himself, and then vehemently exclaimed: "You are right, doctor; Combelaïne is about to marry Mademoiselle de Maillefert. Not a week ago, I myself wrote an article on the deterioration of the national character—stating that one of the oldest families of France was about to give their daughter to a miserable adventurer, without either money or honour."

He did not speak; he roared, and Adonis, the waiter, awoke with a start. Recognizing the doctor, he rose with a cheerful "good-morning," and then, drawing M. Legris aside, he explained that Raymond was waiting for him in a small room up-stairs.

Hastily deserting the journalist, who seemed quite shocked at his abruptness, Dr. Legris was up-stairs in three seconds. Raymond was smoking a cigar beside a table on which stood an untouched glass of beer.

"What!" cried the doctor, utterly exasperated, "you sit here calm and comfortable, and yet you know the police to be at your heels. Come with me—this house has a rear door that I know of."

But Raymond did not move. "Oh! there is no hurry," he said in a strange sort of way.

"No hurry! But do you not know that one hundred and fifty at least of your friends are already arrested?"

"It is because I know it, that I am not alarmed."

"Oh! Come now!"

"Permit me to explain. Don't you think it strange that I was not the first one arrested, when in reality the expedition was directed against me?"

"Very strange, and so I said to Krauss."

"I did not think of it until this morning, when a member of the society came to me and said: 'All is discovered—fly!'"

"I did fly, but I reflected later. The police are not such fools. If I were warned, it was because they intended me to be. I am convinced that they do not wish to imprison me."

"But, my dear fellow——"

"Wait a moment; let me show you. Would my arrest rid De Combelaïne and his honourable associates of me? By no means? It would expose them, on the contrary to most dangerous revelations. But if, on the contrary, they induced me to fly to Belgium, I should leave the field clear, and they would be quiet to do as they pleased."

The doctor rubbed his forehead. "Ah!" he muttered, "I did not think of that."

"Let me finish. Combelaïne, undoubtedly, supposes me to be the person who carried off his papers. Of course, if that were the case, I should have them about me, so that was why he set his banditti upon me at once. They would attack me again at their very first opportunity. But a conspirator who is obliged to keep himself concealed is about the least dangerous enemy a man can have, and one that he will find the easiest to get rid of. Let him be found some morning dead in the gutter, with a dagger in his breast, and no one will take the trouble to make any inquiry."

He expressed himself with such cold indifference that the doctor was struck by it. "What a tone you speak in!" he exclaimed.

"I say it simply like a man who has nothing to fear or dread in life would be likely to say it. It would be a great favour, on M. de Combelaïne's part, if he would have me assassinated."

Legris was confounded. "I wish," he said, "you wouldn't talk in that way. When I left you yesterday you were full of hope."

Raymond's eyes flashed. "Haven't you noticed," he said, "that I have not even taken the trouble to ask the result of your inquiries?" As he spoke he drew a letter from his pocket and threw it on the table. "I received this note this morning," he continued. "Read it, and you will understand my present mood."

It was a letter from Simone. "So prayers, tears, and supplications are useless," she wrote. "You act, you have acted, and all is lost. My sacrifice—the saddest which a woman can ever make—is rendered useless. I shall have given my life for nothing. I shall not have saved the honour of the house and the name which my father so prized, and which will now be for ever blasted. And it is you who have done this!—you who claim to be my best, my only friend! So isn't your love the most selfish of passions? Do not try to write to me and excuse yourself. Never again will my lips pronounce your name, while God allows me to live on earth. As for the few days which remain to me I shall spend them in tearing from my heart a love which now fills me with horror. Rejoice at your work, and, if you can, forget

"SIMONE DE MAILLEFERT."

"What do you think of that?" asked Raymond, bitterly, as Dr. Legris laid down the letter.

"This letter," was the reply, "is the result of yesterday's events."

"I don't see that."

"You will see it when I tell you that Philippe is in prison, accused embezzlement."

As in a vision Raymond at once recalled the young Duke de Maillefert as he had seen him one morning on the steps of the mansion, pale, undecided, and agitated, between Verdale and Combelaïne. "It is abominable!" he cried. "Philippe is a fool, and selfish to a degree, but he is incapable of crime."

"So Madame Bergam says."

"He is the victim of some diabolical conspiracy!"

"I am sure of it. I can almost prove it."

Raymond's colour rose, and he answered eagerly: "All is not lost, then!"

Dr. Legris smiled. "I feel certain," he replied, "that our triumph is at hand, for I am positive that Laurent Cornevin keeps in the background, and strikes these blows from out of the shade. Listen to what I have done to-day."

He then rapidly related his visit to Madame Bergam, mentioning the appearance of Grollet, and M. Verdale, the latter's treatment of Madame Lucy, and what he said to her, and, finally, the story of the duke's arrest, as he had heard it from Peyrolas."

Raymond was stunned. "Yes," he said at last, "light is breaking. But will Simone retract her words?"

"Yes, if we save her brother."

"Alas! what can we do for him?"

"Who can tell? Have I not told you that discord is in your enemies' camp? for it was not Verdale who denounced the duke—that's clear. It was Combelaïne. Verdale wished to confine himself to threats, but Combelaïne has gone on ahead, and carried the threats into execution. Now we must find some one who has influence over Verdale. Who could that be? Have we any such person near us? Yes; for one day when you wanted to call Combelaïne out, Verdale and Roberjot met, by accident, in your presence. What happened then? Did you not tell me that Verdale, on seeing Roberjot, became as white as linen, although naturally so red, and humble even to servility, although usually so arrogant? This shows that there is some secret between them. Come—we will go and see Roberjot."

Nothing was more trying to Raymond than this step. Nothing was more humiliating than to confess to Roberjot, now that he needed his help, all that he had so long concealed from him. But as M. Roberjot was the only person to whom he could turn in his extremity, he was forced to submit. "Let us go," he said, after the hesitation of a moment. "I shall be followed, I know; but what does that matter, since I am certain they won't arrest me? It will be time to-night to decide how to throw them off the track."

Roberjot was just sitting down to dinner when his servant told him that M. Delorge was there and wished to see him. "Show him in!" cried the lawyer, and he darted to meet his young friend with his napkin in his hand. "Is it you?" he said; "your mother thinks you far on your way to Belgium. Have you lost your head, or do you prefer incarceration to liberty?"

"I believe myself to be running no possible danger," answered Raymond; "and when I have made you master of the whole affair, you will understand my conduct." He moved aside as he said this, and added, "My friend, Dr. Legris, and I have come to you for advice and assistance."

Roberjot did not seem particularly charmed by this preamble—nor by the presence of this stranger whom he had not seen at first. But putting a

good face on the matter, he invited the two friends into the dining-room. As soon as they were seated, Dr. Legris opened his batteries, and told Roberjot precisely in what position Raymond stood, and all that had happened.

So interested was the lawyer that he forgot to eat. From time to time he exclaimed: "Ah! yes, I see. Now I understand this young man's low spirits."

But when the doctor got as far as the arrest of the Duke de Maillefer, and at the part probably played in it by Verdale, the lawyer exclaimed: "Raymond! Raymond! You simpleton, if you had only trusted me." And his brow grew dark. "Unfortunately," he continued, "what I could have done three months ago is impossible for me to do to-day. Raymond, do you remember that visit you paid me when you first came back to Paris? Do you remember that Verdale's son came in? He never acknowledged it, nor did I allow him to think I suspected it, but I am convinced now, as I was then, that it was his worthy father who sent him to me. Do you know what he came for? It was to implore me to give him a letter which I possessed—only ten lines long, but which made Verdale my abject slave. The young man expressed himself in words which seemed to spring straight from his heart, and a noble one too. He touched me and —"

"And what?" breathlessly asked the doctor.

"And I gave him the letter!"

Roberjot started up with such violence that the table was nearly overturned. "All is not lost," he cried; "no, I possess a weapon that my good friend Verdale does not even suspect. Decidedly there is a Providence which watches over honest people."

Raymond and the doctor would have liked to have had him explain himself more clearly, but, to all their questions, he would only say: "Patience! I don't want you to be disappointed again. I hope, but I am not by any means sure of my facts. Everything depends on a friend of mine who was a stock broker in 1852."

He then rang for his servant, had plates laid for Raymond and the doctor, and insisted on their sharing his meal. At eight o'clock the three men left table, and, entering a cab, they drove to the Rue Taitbout, where Roberjot's old friend resided. The lawyer went into the house alone, but he did not remain there more than ten minutes, and when he came out his face was radiant. "Victory!" he cried to the two young men. "We will now see Verdale. Driver—to No. 72 Avenue d'Antin?" he added, "and drive sharp."

IV.

It was in the Avenue d'Antin, in the centre of the Champs Elysées, that Verdale, the millionaire, now resided. He had built the palace of his dreams, the most magnificent of all the plans which had grown musty in his portfolio in the days when he was "unappreciated." Any one who glanced at the front of the house, one mass of ornamentation and sculpture, would have immediately said: "There lives a parvenu!"

Nine o'clock had just struck when the cab conveying Roberjot, Raymond, and Dr. Legris drew up before the door.

"The baron is certainly at home," answered the porter, "but I doubt if he will receive you. Apply to one of those footmen."

There were several lacqueys, in a most brilliant livery, lounging about the vestibule, and one of them said that his master was very much occupied but would perhaps see them if they would wait and take the trouble to follow him. They did follow him, and he led them up a stately marble staircase, and after conducting them through several magnificently furnished reception-rooms, ushered them into a small apartment, hung with green velvet and lighted by a single lamp. "Please be seated," said the servant, "and as soon as my master is disengaged he will send here and tell you so."

Roberjot frowned—all this ceremony annoyed him. "If Verdale knew what was in store for him," he muttered, "he would not keep us kicking our heels in this way."

A bright light came from under one of the velvet door hangings. Evidently, the door behind was open, and some one had just entered the next room. "That is probably the dear baron's study," thought the doctor. And as if to emphasize this supposition, a sharp commanding ring was heard, and as soon as steps were heard on the parquetry, some one asked, imperiously: "Where is the chevalier?"

"With Madame la Baronne," answered a humble voice.

"Go and tell him I wish to see him for a few minutes."

Roberjot leaned toward the doctor. "That is Verdale's voice," he said.

A silence of three or four minutes ensued. Then a door opened and shut, and the voice which Roberjot had said was that of his old companion, was heard again. "You know why I sent for you, chevalier?"

"I suspect the reason, my dear father," answered a full, well-modulated voice.

"I am extremely displeased."

"And I am far from satisfied."

Roberjot smiled. Now that he knew it was father and son in the next room, he found infinite amusement in hearing Verdale address his son in all seriousness as the "chevalier."

"Ah! you are not satisfied?" replied Verdale in a tone of intense irritation.

"I am not, indeed, sir."

"And why?"

"Because if I am not on my guard you will end by making me utterly ridiculous."

"I make you ridiculous?"

"Yes, sir."

"And how, if you please, how?"

"By persisting in calling me by the title of chevalier, to which I have no possible right. You, my dear father—you assume the title of baron; I deplore it, but I cannot prevent it. But, now, that you are trying to impose on me this ridiculous appellation of 'chevalier,' I desire to inform you that I will not bear it. And every time that in your notes of invitation you call me the Chevalier Verdale, I will do precisely what I did yesterday: I will send notes everywhere, saying that the word chevalier was a printer's blunder."

Raymond, Legris, and the lawyer looked at each other in considerable astonishment.

"My son, it strikes me that you are extremely philosophical," exclaimed Verdale, who was evidently losing his temper.

"I try to be," answered the young man.

"And you are a democrat, too, of course?"

"In a way, I am."

The architect stamped his foot. "You are proud of our origin?" he asked, sneeringly.

"And why not? Our ancestors were honest people, and that is all I care about. But if I had your ideas, father, and really wished people to forget my origin, I should not do my best to remind them of it. As long as you were only Verdale, nobody cared, or asked, whence you came or your parents either; but the very day you placed "baron" on your visiting card they took pains to ask who your father was. Then they went further, and they discovered what? That my grandmother—your mother—sold fish at the central markets."

"Lucien!"

"Its useless to deny it. I know twenty persons whom she always served; besides our name is still on a sign there. Go yourself and you can see it, 'Binjard, successor to Verdale.'"

"But no one would ever have known this but for you; you shouted it from the house tops."

"Excuse me; I boasted of it, as it were, so that I might not be laughed at. Dining with my friends, if I said, 'Give me some of that fish; I know when fish is good, for my grandmother used to sell it'—no one laughed at me; I was not ridiculous. But what should I be if some one maliciously remarked; 'Have some fish, chevalier? you ought to be a good judge of it.'"

Verdale interrupted his son with a terrible oath. "You are making a great mistake," he cried.

"And how?"

"It is a mistake to oppose me in this way. You have your own opinion, so be it; then have courage too. If you reject the title, be brave enough to reject the fortune which I place at your disposal—the one was to sustain the other."

"My dear father!"

"Select a profession—earn your own bread, and then you will have a right to your ideas and opinions. Until then——"

"But you know that it is your own fault if I have not done so long ago. You know that in remaining with you, under your roof, I have only yielded to the prayers and entreaties of my mother. You know, too, that I don't spend the fifth part of the income which your generosity has placed at my disposal."

"Say then—as you are so near it—that if I were to die, you would reject the fortune I should leave behind me."

There was a long pause, and then, in a voice that evinced considerable agitation, the young man slowly replied: "I would not accept it!"

The situation was a most awkward one for our three friends—for it was evident that their presence in the little room was quite unsuspected. "Are we to descend to this degradation?" muttered Raymond—"are we to steal the secrets of these people?"

"We should have some fine ones," murmured the doctor.

But Raymond's decision was taken and he calmly overturned a heavy chair. "They will hear that, I fancy!" he said, aloud.

Almost at the same moment the heavy, velvet door curtain, which separated the two rooms, was drawn aside, and the intelligent head and face of the younger Verdale appeared. He seemed utterly stupefied at the sight of these three men, and more stupefied still when he recognized the lawyer. "Monsieur Roberjot!" he cried.

At this name his father appeared, and for a moment he did not speak. His eyes wandered from his old friend to Raymond Delorge and then to Dr. Legris; in whom he recognized the person he had seen at Madame Lucy Bergam's. "How long have you been here, gentlemen?" he asked at last.

"About twenty minutes," replied the doctor, in the most urbane manner.

An oath betrayed the architect's indignation. "This is the manner in which my servants behave!" he cried. "This is the way they attend to their duties!"

He rushed to the bell-rope, and pulled it with such frantic vehemence that it came off in his hand. All the doors flew open, and in poured a number of servants.

"Who opened the door to these gentlemen?" asked Verdale, in a most threatening tone.

"It was I, sir——" replied one of the footmen, piteously.

"Did you not ask for their cards?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then, why did you not bring them to me?"

"Because you were engaged, sir."

"Is that any reason why you should show visitors into one of the rooms without informing me?"

"But, sir——"

"That will do. You are no longer in my service. You will receive a month's wages and leave the house to-morrow morning."

Verdale was purple with rage. He gesticulated and shouted and went on like a madman. Roberjot, who knew him well, watched him calmly, and soon made up his mind that his anger was feigned, and that the whole scene was a little comedy enacted to gain time for resisting the attack which the architect saw was coming. When the servants had withdrawn, Verdale, indeed, suddenly changed his tone. "Excuse me, gentlemen," he said, "but this reproof and summary execution were absolutely essential. It is absolutely lamentable the way we are served nowadays." So speaking, he raised the velvet door-curtain again. "Do me the honour to walk this way," he added.

The room they now entered was M. Verdale's favourite apartment, the sanctuary to which he resorted for meditation, if not for prayer. It was there he always received his friends, and everything was arranged with the deliberate intention of dazzling the beholder, from the carpet to the ceiling, and to the splendid curtains of the three windows. In the most gracious way he rolled easy-chairs towards his guests, and then addressing his son: "I will release you now, Lucien," he said.

But this did not suit M. Roberjot. The conversation he had overheard between the father and son convinced him of the truth of his old suspicions—that they were not of the same opinion on many subjects. So he hastily rose; "I should be glad, my dear baron," he exclaimed, "if your son would consent to be present at our interview."

Verdale restrained a movement of impatience with difficulty. "Stay, then!" he said to his son.

And turning to his former friend, he continued: "Pray have the goodness to tell me to what I owe the pleasure of your visit?"

Roberjot had prepared a little speech—not so much what he wished to say, as the order in which he should bring matters forward. "These are the

facts," he began in a dry tone, "and I desire you to understand, my dear baron, that I speak in my own name as well as in the name of my friend, M. Raymond Delorge."

The architect bowed ceremoniously.

M. Roberjot then went on speaking slowly, emphasizing each word: "We have come in a friendly spirit to beg you to set the young Duke de Maillefert at liberty. We know, of course, that you have nothing to do with his arrest. We understand that he was arrested contrary to your wishes. Oh! certainly, for we know that you mentioned this fact in the presence of Dr. Legris. We know that the duke was arrested on a complaint preferred by the Count de Combelaïne."

Although Verdale had expected something of this kind, he grew very pale. "Unfortunately," he answered, "you over-estimate my influence. Now that the law has taken the affair in hand, I can do nothing. The duke, whether he be innocent or guilty——"

"You know better than anyone that he is not guilty," interrupted Roberjot, coldly; and then, with a gesture that imposed silence on the discomfited architect, he went on. "I have not finished. M. de Combelaïne wishes to marry Mademoiselle Simone de Maillefert, who is loved by Raymond Delorge, and who loves him. This marriage would be the death of this unfortunate girl, and so we have come—in a friendly spirit, you understand—to prevent this marriage."

Perhaps it was to conceal his agitation that Verdale now rose. "This is the sheerest folly," he cried.

Dr. Legris and Raymond hardly dared breathe, so fully did they realize the importance of each word exchanged by these two men. They scarcely looked at Lucien Verdale, who, very pale with compressed lips, stood leaning against the mantelpiece.

"We rely on you, baron," repeated Roberjot, after a long pause.

A spasm of anger contracted the features of the architect, and, in a hoarse voice, he said: "I can only repeat what I have just told you."

"What is that?"

"That it is folly to come and ask a man to interfere with matters which are no concern of his, and for which he really cares not one straw."

"Is that the truth?" asked Roberjot, in an ironical tone.

Verdale did not reply, and after a moment the lawyer continued: "Believe me, it is unwise to spend our time in disputing. An intrigue exists, and you are the prime mover in it. Do not deny it—it is useless. Who went to Rosiers to examine the property of the young heiress? Who was it who placed an enormous credit at the disposal of De Combelaïne, when twenty-four hours before he would not have lent him ten louis to save his life? Who was it who pushed poor Philippe to the edge of the precipice over which he rolled? Was it not you, M. Verdale? Then show me, if you please, that there is no connection between Combelaïne's marriage and the duke's arrest."

These accusations were preferred in two forcible a manner for Verdale to deny them. "And what if there were?" he finally asked.

"I have only to say," continued Roberjot, without answering this question, "that what you have done, you must undo. Now? Ah! that is not for me to say. Within forty-eight hours, however, you must see that the Duke de Maillefert is restored to liberty, and that M. de Combelaïne has renounced the hand—that is to say, the millions—of Mademoiselle Simone."

"I must! Did you say must?"

"Yes. Absolutely."

The architect took from his desk a paper knife, which, silver as it was, he twisted and broke in his convulsed, angry fingers. "You are mad, Roberjot, I tell you. If you are the friend of M. Delorge, I am the friend of M. de Combelaine; I have sustained him, against everything and everybody."

The lawyer leaned forward in his chair. "Take care, M. Verdale," he said, "reflect a little before you commit yourself."

It was not the architect who replied. His son stepped forward, and said gently, but firmly: "No human being shall speak in that way to my father in my presence, and in his house."

So threatening was his attitude that Raymond and Legris started up. But Roberjot was one of those men whom nothing disconcerts, and who never lose their presence of mind. He at once saw the benefit he could derive from this interference, and quite pleased thereat, he answered: "I should not be driven to the necessity, sir, of threatening your father in this way, had you not urged me to give you a letter which would have insured my safety, and that of my friends."

The poor fellow's eyes dropped.

"Have you forgotten," continued the lawyer, pitilessly, "what happened on the day of your visit. What did you tell me? That you wished to marry a young girl whom you adored, and that your father had said he would never give his consent until he was in possession of a certain letter which I had obstinately refused to give him. And upon this you came to me, as you said, without his knowledge."

"Which was true, sir."

"Then what did I do? Moved by your grief and touched by your prayers, I said, 'Here, take the letter, I will give it to you;' and I did so—so that you might hand it to your father—and I placed it in a sealed envelope."

"It is true," murmured the young man, "it is true."

Anyone who knew Roberjot would have read in his eyes the certainty of success. "Undoubtedly," he continued, "you asked yourself the reason of this precaution. I will tell you, sir. I wished to spare you the terrible sorrow of despising your father." He stopped for a moment as if to allow his words to produce their full effect, and then continued more slowly: "You may therefore understand that I act to-day under the influence of inexorable necessity. It deeply pains me to afflict you, but I have duties to fulfil. I wish to save the honour of the Duke de Maillefert and the lives of his sister and my friend, Raymond Delorge. I have to defend the happiness of all the people I love, so I must speak."

"What do you mean, Sir?"

"Ask your father what that letter contained, and under what circumstances it was written."

The architect had grown deadly pale. "Roberjot!" he murmured, with parched lips.

"Do what I ask then," the lawyer replied.

Frightful indecision was apparent on Verdale's face. Then all at once he exclaimed "No, I won't! It were better that my son should know the contents of that letter, that he should know it was but the simple admission of one of those reckless escapades which youth is so prone to."

"One of those reckless escapades has landed poor Philippe de Maillefert in prison."

Verdale tried to resist. "I do not admit the comparison," he said.

"And you are right," answered the lawyer in a tone of ironical politeness.

ness. "I can recall the very words of your letter. I will repeat them and see if our friends will believe that you looked on the affair at that time as lightly as you do to-day: 'Friend Roberjot,' you wrote, 'if on the receipt of this letter you should show it to the public prosecutor, he would at once issue a warrant for my arrest. I should be judged and condemned. For I have appropriated, through a forgery, the title deed you intrusted to me.' And it was signed with your name, in full—Verdale."

Crushed by this terrible revelation, poor Lucien staggered to a chair.

But Verdale was above all this weakness. "It is true," he said, in a hoarse voice, "that, to my great misfortune, I borrowed one hundred and sixty thousand francs from you, for eight days. But you were my friend. Did I not repay you on the appointed day?"

"Yes."

"Did I not, moreover, offer you half of the immense amount which, thanks to Coutanceau, I had just realized?"

"Yes."

"Very well, then—what more do you want? And why do you come here and insult me?"

Verdale, who had been so white, had recovered his habitual audacity with such suddenness that Raymond and Dr. Legris were petrified. The reason of this change, however, was a most simple one. The architect had always dreaded that his son should learn the ignominious source of his fortune. But Lucien knew it now—the apprehension was removed from his father's mind, and fate had done its worst—he had nothing more to dread.

"To any one but yourself, Roberjot," he continued, "I should say: We are quits; go your way, and I will go mine. But we—my old friend—we have an account to settle, an account that has been running eighteen years." As he spoke the colour had returned to his cheeks, and his voice grew fuller and more pompous. "Having faith in your friendship," he continued, "I most foolishly gave myself into your hands, bound hand and foot by that stupid letter, of which you have retained so exact a recollection. How did you reward my confidence? For eighteen years you held this fatal proof suspended over my head. I ceased to belong to myself—I had no will of my own. I was afraid to undertake anything. If an idea came to me, before I could decide on it, I was reduced to saying to myself, 'What will Roberjot think of it?' Were you not my master? For eighteen years, as I told you, I lived with the atrocious idea that there was a man who was my master in this world—a man who by one single act of his could overturn the edifice I had raised with such infinite labour—who could leave me without honour or money, and, moreover, rob me of my son's affection."

Lucien Verdale looked up. "Father!" he murmured.

But his voice was not heard. The architect continued with rapidly increasing excitement: "And it is of this man—this man, on whom you have inflicted such intolerable suffering and humiliation—that you, Roberjot, whom I have heard called clever, have come to ask a service. Have you lost your head? Don't you understand that it is my revenge you have offered me at last? Ah! you are interested in Philippe de Maillefert, are you? In Mademoiselle Simone and M. Raymond Delorge? Then that is quite sufficient reason for me to swear implacable hatred against them and against you. Merely because you execrate Combelaïne, I will remain his faithful and devoted friend. I will sustain him with my money and my credit. Now it is irrevocable. The Duke de Maillefert shall go to a convict's prison, and his sister shall marry the Count de Combelaïne."

His tone indicated such mortal hatred and such firmness, that Dr. Legris and Raymond could not help shuddering. But Roberjot was calm. "Take care, Verdale," he said coldly, "take care."

The architect was furious. "Take care! Why should I take care?" he exclaimed. "The time is past when your threats could make me tremble. That letter, which, for eighteen years you held like a knife at my throat, is no longer in existence. It is burned."

Roberjot slowly rose from his chair, and leaning on the back of it, quietly said: "Are you sure that this letter was the only proof against you?"

"I am, indeed."

"Allow me, then, to inform you that you are very much mistaken."

Verdale started—and his eyes wavered. But speedily recovering himself: "Fool that I am!" he cried, "not to see that you are trying to frighten me."

Roberjot shook his head. "Yes, you are foolish," he said, "not to understand that I should never have said to you, 'I insist' and 'you must' unless I had the means of compelling you. No; I have not lost my head. I knew your feelings towards me perfectly well." And without allowing the architect time to speak, he continued: "The letter in which you admitted your forgery is destroyed. Very well. But the forgery itself—where is that?"

"The forgery itself," stammered Verdale.

"Yes—listen to me—I will tell you its story. When I received that letter from you my first movement was to hurry to my broker's. How had he ventured to take such a step without consulting me? On investigation I learned the truth. You had forged an order from me to him, directing him to pay the whole amount of the sale over to you. When I saw the signature I was confounded, it was so like my own. The agent saw by my surprise that something was wrong. He questioned me. I might have denounced you, but I did not do so. I begged my friend, however, to preserve this forgery with the greatest care, telling him I might some day need it."

"Well?"

"I have just seen my friend. He has the document, and holds it at my disposal."

The architect bore up bravely under this blow, and drove away the sinister apprehensions which assailed him. "Do you call that a proof?" he finally asked.

"It would not be considered one, possibly in a court; besides you are safe through the statutes of limitation. But it will serve my purposes very well——"

The architect listened. He was trying to fully understand those new dangers.

"I shall call in your old friend Coutanceau, and if that's not enough, I can bring forward another witness——"

"And who may that be?"

"Your son."

Verdale started back as if he had seen a ghost. "And do you think," he cried, "that my son would raise his voice to accuse his father, and dishonour the name he bears?"

"I have his word," said Roberjot coldly. And addressing Lucien, he added, "Do you remember our agreement, when I gave you that letter?"

"Oh! sir," stammered the young man, "I remember it, but——"

"I said to you then in almost these words, 'Your father hates me. When

he knows me to be without weapons against him he will seek to be revenged.' Then what did you say? 'If ever my father attempts anything against you—you or your friends—I will stand beside you and against him, I give you my word of honour.' Did you not say this?"

"Yes; I said it."

"And if I summoned you to keep your word."

The young man hesitated and then in a husky voice replied: "I should keep it."

Verdale, on hearing these words, swayed to and fro and caught at the table. He seemed to be stifling; he gasped for breath, and tore his waistcoat open. "He would keep his word! He, my son!" And as the unfortunate young man went towards him, he repelled him, and with a superhuman effort turned to Roberjot: "You have won the day," said he, "I am in your power—do what you choose with me."

Dr. Legris, Raymond, and Roberjot were deeply moved; but the lawyer proceeded to take advantage of the situation. "You knew me well enough, sir," he said, gently, "to be certain that I shall act only at the last extremity. I have no hatred against you; do what we ask of you—will you not?"

The architect shrugged his shoulders despairingly. "How can I?" he cried; and after a little reflection he said hastily: "Suppose, when you received that letter of mine, in which I denounced myself, suppose you had laid it before the authorities. What would have happened? I should have been arrested and a trial would have been ordered as soon as possible. Suppose that my wife had then come and thrown herself at your feet, entreating you to save me, what would you have said?"

"That it was too late, that the matter was out of my hands, and that I could do nothing."

"Very well; that is precisely my position."

"But Philippe de Maillefert is innocent."

"So he is to a certain extent. But not in appearance."

"An infamous snare had been laid for him."

"I do not deny it."

"You see then——"

"I see nothing. If forgeries exist, they are the work of M. de Maillefert, and so M. de Maillefert is a forger."

"Oh!"

"I simply use the words employed by M. Barban d'Avranchel."

Verdale was right, and Roberjot knew it. His contracted brows showed this. However, after a moment of meditation he went on: "Do you think that the duke knew what he was doing?"

"Oh! perfectly."

"Do you mean that he knew himself to be running the risk of a convict's cell?"

"No. He simply thought he appeared to risk it."

It was so difficult to reconcile these replies that Raymond and Legris looked at each other interrogatively. Roberjot himself was a little bewildered, but he presently said: "I do not doubt your sincerity, M. Verdale. But let us lay our cards on the table. Let us cease questioning, and you, tell us all you know."

Verdale hesitated. It was very evident that he was suffering acutely.

"Go on, father," said Lucien, gently.

Verdale started at these words. "To save myself here, is not necessarily to lose myself with the others," he muttered,

Then all at once his lips parted, and in the tone of a man who was utterly desperate: "You know as well as I," he began, "the situation of Madame de Maillefert and her son during the last few years. Ruined, head over heels in debt, they had not a farthing except what was given them by Mademoiselle Simone. But they were far from being grateful, for the income did not suffice them; they wanted the capital. They tried a score of times ✓ to induce the young lady to consent to their wishes; but they never succeeded. However, the Duchess de Maumussy came to their help. 'Suppose,' she said, 'that the duke formed or joined a company of some kind, some financial enterprise. Suppose Philippe, in order to raise money, could be induced to commit a forgery. Would not Mademoiselle Simone give her whole fortune to shield him from the consequences of his act? Of course she would. Very well, then; Philippe must pretend to do just what he is incapable of doing. He must be at the head of some company; he must pretend to have committed forgery, and he must fly to his sister and implore her to save him. She will give him everything he asks for, and the matter will be settled.'

"Knowing Simone's character as they did, the duchess and her son grasped at Madame de Maumussy's suggestion. But they could not execute this plan alone; they required assistants and accomplices, not so easy to find. But Madame de Maumussy helped them. Having supplied the idea, she felt herself called upon to supply the man—and this man was the Count de Combelaïne. Summoned by her, Combelaïne went secretly to Saumur, where his first interview with Madame de Maillefert and her son took place. As soon as he understood what was wished, he promptly said he would undertake the transaction, and answer for its success, providing they gave him Mademoiselle Simone's hand with a dowry which he fixed. We must do Madame de Maillefert the justice to say that she hesitated. This condition seemed frightfully hard, not for her daughter so much as for herself. She knew M. de Combelaïne, and the prospect of having him for a son-in-law was particularly disagreeable to her. Not daring to refuse point blank, she pleaded prior engagements of her daughter's and her own. She declared that Simone loved some one else—that she would never give her consent—that her character was too absolute to submit to advice or control. But De Combelaïne was not dismayed, he declared that he would undertake to obtain Simone's consent himself. So the treaty was finally signed, thanks to the Duchess de Maumussy, who had some especial enmity against Simone."

Verdale was evidently about to throw a strong light on this dark intrigue. It was with pale faces that Dr. Legris, Raymond, and Roberjot listened, forgetting the presence of Lucien Verdale, who stood by the chimney-piece, looking very much like a criminal before his judges.

"You see, of course," continued the architect, "that Combelaïne could not act alone. He came to me—and I assure you, on my honour, that the truth was not revealed to me. Had I ever suspected it, I should not be where I am now. But Combelaïne simply told me that some friends of his, a noble lady and her son were in trouble—from which he wished to release them—and, at the same time, to arrange his own marriage with a daughter of the same family. What he proposed to do, he said, was not altogether correct, but he added that, after all, there was no harm in it. In the end, I promised him my assistance."

Raymond here hastily intervened: "Do not forget your visit to Maillefert," he said.

But Roberjot nudged his elbow and checked his words. Was it not natural for M. Verdale to try and exculpate himself, and throw all this.

odious intrigue on his accomplices? And what did it matter whether he were a little less or a little more guilty?

"I went to Maillefert," replied the architect, "but only to assure myself that M. de Combelaïne had not deceived me, and that the affair he proposed to me was really a serious one. He had fooled me several times, he owed me a great deal of money, and I distrusted him. I told him, however, that up to a certain point I was at his disposal. He had often drawn me into speculations which necessitated delicate negotiations. I had had the imprudence to write to him, he had preserved all our correspondence, and often threatened me with it."

The architect began to wander from the point. "Let us get back to Philippe de Maillefert," said Roberjot, gently.

Verdale frowned angrily, but continued: "The fortune once ascertained, the execution of the plan was by no means difficult. I was then as I am now the head of a financial society, 'The Rural Bank.' Combelaïne was, and is, one of the directors. I nominated Philippe de Maillefert, first as a member of the council, next as one of the board. This position gave him certain opportunities of which he availed himself. Encouraged by Combelaïne—for he hesitated at the last moment—Philippe carried off about three million five hundred thousand francs' worth of title-deeds, etc., and concealed this abstraction by forged entries, which were as awkward and as authentic as possible. Was he a thief and a forger? Not in the usual sense of the word. His idea was that he was simply playing a part in a comedy enacted to deceive his sister, and he never dreamed of incurring the smallest possible risk. Nor did he attempt to dispose of these deeds, but left them in Combelaïne's hands. Whenever Combelaïne or the duke required any money, I advanced it. And when this was done Philippe started for Maillefert, there to play the great scene on which success depended, and which I felt to be utterly odious. But I had now gone too far to retreat. Taking his sister aside, Philippe told her that, in sore distress, harassed by gambling debts, and urged by treacherous friends, he had speculated on the Bourse and lost considerable sums which did not belong to him. He added that all must now be discovered, and that, preferring death to dishonour, he should blow out his brains if his sister did not come to his assistance. Simone never doubted her brother. She instantly declared that she would arrange everything, even if her whole fortune were sacrificed. So Philippe came back to us in high delight, saying: 'It is all right; my sister will be here to-morrow.'"

The uneasy glance which Verdale gave his son indicated that all he had said was as nothing to what was coming. "If Combelaïne had been a man like other people," he continued, "everything would have gone smoothly Mademoiselle Simone sold out property to the amount of four millions, and our purpose was accomplished. But Combelaïne was not the person to renounce the fortune which, after this sacrifice, still remained in the young lady's hands. When she sent for him he told her that this business of the duke's was by no means so simple or so easily concluded. He would use all his influence to bring it to a happy conclusion, he added, on one condition, namely, that if he succeeded, Mademoiselle Simone would consent to become his wife. I was present at this scene, and nothing could equal the poor girl's horror. But, in the gentlest tone she replied that she no longer belonged to herself—having arranged her future. However, Combelaïne continued to insist, and so brutally and awkwardly, that Mademoiselle de Maillefert, wounded and angry, at last exclaimed, in a tone of the most

crushing contempt: 'I understand, sir—the millions that still remain to me excite your cupidity. Very well; save the honour of our house and you shall have them, but as to becoming your wife—never.'

"By this single sentence she made an enemy for life of a man who never forgets nor forgives. Before she said this, he only cared for her dowry—nothing for herself. But now the woman, quite as much as her fortune, became the object of his desires. 'That haughty creature,' he said to me, 'shall be my wife, or else her ducal brother shall go to a convict's cell!' I endeavoured to pacify him, but all in vain. And when, two or three days later, I threatened him, and said that I should go over to Mademoiselle Simone's side, he answered with a sneer: 'You are late in the day. I hold you under my thumb quite as securely as I hold Philippe. You don't suppose, do you, that I have allowed all those papers to get mouldy in my drawer? I did my best to get ten thousand francs from you, but you refused. I had creditors. Draw your own inferences!'"

Did Verdale speak the truth? At all events his voice was wrathful, and seemed to indicate the natural indignation of a man who knows himself to have been duped. "The count's sarcasms opened my eyes even more than his threats," he continued. "I understood that I had been fooled and made a tool of by one of those traitors who, for a very small consideration, do not hesitate to betray their companions. I discovered that his intention was to get possession of this poor girl's entire fortune, and that he would never return the deeds which had been entrusted to him, and for which poor Philippe would sooner or later pay with his honour and liberty."

Lucien Verdale, who had been looking at his father in a kind of stupor, now interrupted, in a hoarse tone: "But this is monstrous!"

"Yes, monstrous," repeated the architect. "But Combelaïne held me tight. Had he not my correspondence in his mistress's keeping—and, besides, such was the position of the Rural Bank that a disturbance, a public scandal, would have brought bankruptcy on my head at once."

"It is disgraceful," muttered Lucien. "Oh! I don't pretend to excuse myself," continued his father. "I merely wish to explain why I stood and gazed with folded arms at the horrible drama enacted at the Maillefert mansion. Debased as were the characters of the duchess and her son, they were not altogether so heartless as to witness the poor girl's agony unmoved. They began to realize that this marriage would be her death, and tried to dissuade De Combelaïne. Then when they saw that he was unmoved by their entreaties, they ended by declaring that they would withdraw their consent. 'Just as you please,' he replied, coldly; 'but in that case France will have the pleasure of seeing something strange—the Duke de Maillefert standing in the criminal's dock. However, as I am not utterly hard-hearted, I grant you forty-eight hours for reflection!' I was there, and I assure you that had I seen any way of aiding these people I should have done so. But I was threatened as well, and it was with a bitter sense of my own powerlessness that I looked on at the scene which followed Combelaïne's departure. Philippe himself was wild with grief and anger. He is not altogether corrupt, this young fellow. He is headstrong and thoughtless, but the situation to which he had reduced his sister awoke in him every manly, honourable instinct which had been lying dormant. He swore that this marriage should never take place, and declared, as it was he who had been the first and only one to do wrong, he alone would bear the penalty. He knew, he said, that Combelaïne would not listen to him, and so he should blow out his brains."

"Were I to live for centuries I shall never forget the tone in which Made-moiselle Simone replied to her brother: 'If your death, Philippe, would save your honour, I myself would load your pistols. But your death would not end the matter. People would still say that a Duke de Maillefert had been a thief and forgerer. And this must not be. No; you must not raise your hand against yourself. I shall do my duty!' As for the Duchess de Maillefert she was wild with rage. Without understanding as I did Combelaïne's entire game, she saw that if her daughter's fortune ever became his, he would keep it for himself alone. She found herself caught in her own net. For, to allow Simone to be robbed of the millions, the income of which she had always enjoyed, meant ruining herself irretrievably—leaving herself without a farthing. Perhaps it was this that decided her to disclose the facts to her daughter; to tell her that Philippe was only guilty in appearance, that the theft and forgery were, in the beginning, only a most unworthy ruse. The poor young girl was revolted by this revelation, and I heard her sob that to feign a crime was in her eyes worse than to have committed it.

"Meanwhile, before taking any decisive steps, she adopted an idea that I suggested, and which was, that they should try and interest the Duchess de Maumussy in their cause. I knew that Combelaïne had rewarded the duke and the duchess with mere promises for the help they had given him, and that he had taken no pains to keep his promises. I believed that they were very discontented with him, and I hoped to take advantage of their displeasure. However, I was mistaken; for Combelaïne seeing my hesitation, and suspecting that I might fail them at the last moment, had secretly compromised with the Maumussys, and presented them with some of the documents stolen from the Rural Bank. And time had only added increased bitterness to the hatred the duchess felt for Simone. When the De Mailleferts understood this, the following note was received from Mademoiselle Simone:—'I am waiting to see you,' she wrote. 'On one condition—which I will tell you—I will consent!'

"The condition was that, before the marriage, the deficit of the Rural Bank should be made up, and that everything should be destroyed which could directly or indirectly tend to criminate her brother. Combelaïne promised all she desired, with the deliberate intention, as he told me, of breaking his promises. I could, therefore, only heartily approve of Philippe's step, when he declared that he had but one choice, and that was to compel Combelaïne to fight him. Unfortunately, the poor boy had neither the patience or the ability to carry out this design. One evening Combelaïne said to him: 'I have come to tell you that if you challenged me, I should at once send your letter to the public prosecutor. I intend to marry your sister, and we must be friends. Do you understand?'

On hearing this a bandage fell from Raymond's eyes. He now understood the contradictions in Simone's conduct—her tears and indignation—her alternate hope and despair.

Drawing a long breath, Verdale continued: "I have told you all these facts abruptly, but of course you understand that their development was gradual, and that Combelaïne advanced with the most adroit management and hypocrisy. For instance, he kept the De Maillefert mansion going with money that he lent. The expenses of the duchess and her son were something enormous, in spite of their precarious position and melancholy anticipations. So it came to pass that these people, who hated each other so intensely, seemed to be on the most excellent terms. They were polite in

their daily intercourse, and were often seen together in public. Made-moiselle Simone, among the various conditions she made, had stipulated that she should not be obliged to receive De Combelaïne until the day of the marriage. She never left her apartments, and it was only through the talk of one of her maids that we knew her health to be seriously affected. This exasperated Combelaïne to such a degree that I asked myself if it were possible that he, who had never really loved any one, could now be passionately in love with this girl? At least the idea of her dying with grief because she was to be his wife filled him with rage. Sometimes, in speaking of her, he used the most violent and opprobrious epithets, and sometimes he declared that he would give millions to be in the place of Raymond Delorge. 'No matter,' he cried, 'she will be mine, all the same!'

"The wedding day was not yet fixed, and I was astonished to see Combelaïne, near as he was to his triumph, so very gloomy and preoccupied. Whenever I asked what this meant, his reply was invariably, 'Nothing!' And when I asked why he did not hasten his marriage, he shrugged his shoulders and answered, 'Because!' A letter which reached me from Flora Misri at last explained this enigma. This woman, who for twenty years had been Combelaïne's slave, and whom Contanceau and I had amused ourselves with enriching, did not wish her lover to marry. He had sworn to her that she should be his wife, and she declared that she would compel him to keep his promise. She wrote to me with the hope of interesting me in her cause, telling me that she had all Combelaïne's papers, that she would make them public, and, adding, that among these papers there were several letters of my own, which were particularly compromising. I knew that what she said was true, for these very letters were the sole cause of my compliance with Combelaïne's plans. So I hastened to see the count, and with him I found the Duke de Maumussy and the Princess d'Eljensen, both compromised in the same way, and both threatened by Flora with the publication of their correspondence in the newspapers.

"However, Combelaïne's calmness and scornful air reassured us. He declared that there was really no danger, for Flora belonged to him so entirely, and was so utterly his slave, that she would never dare to put her threats into execution. Still this certainly did not prevent him from taking proper precautions. Flora was watched night and day, by half-a-dozen of the most skilful private detectives, who were ordered—at the least appearance of danger—to obtain possession of these papers even by force, if it were necessary. Finally he gave us his word of honour not to marry until he had all these letters and papers safely in his desk again. I went off somewhat quieted, when a most unexpected circumstance put me on the *qui vive* once more. The Duchess de Maillefert, who had so far been as submissive as possible to Combelaïne, now became very restless. Combelaïne spoke one morning of fixing the day for the marriage. 'Oh, there is no hurry!' she said; 'we will discuss it later.' She said this in so singular a tone, that when I was alone with Combelaïne I alluded to it. He laughed at me at first, but when I persisted, he confessed that he was by no means at ease respecting it, and that he was greatly harassed on all sides. He imagined some enemy to be at work, and had begun to suspect his valet, Leonard, who had so far been in his full confidence.

"And what enemy had he bold enough, or persistent enough, to attack him now, except Raymond Delorge, whose father he had killed, and whose betrothed he had stolen? 'But he shall repent of his boyish meddling!' he said

fiercely, 'for I hold the proof of his connection with a secret society which will send him to prison, or Cayenne, whenever I say the word.' Still, despite his apparent confidence, the count was not easy in mind, for he said he should go and see Flora, obtain the letters, and then marry at once. The next morning he came in looking like death, and in a husky voice, he gasped : 'We are lost ! The papers are stolen !' "

After beginning with rage and resistance, Verdale now seemed willing to make a clean breast of it, and resign himself to the situation. He watched his son out of the corner of his eye, and tried to read on the faces of the three friends what impression was made by his fluent eloquence. He continued as follows : "There is no need of describing my fright on hearing that all our correspondence was in the hands of an enemy. I felt that there was but one resource—flight ! Ten years ago this would not have been necessary, for the empire was strong enough to protect its servants—to prove their innocence or throw the indulgent veil of forgetfulness over their peccadilloes. But in 1870, under the Ollivier Ministry—which one day pelted the working-classes with mud, and in the next breath sang the praises of honesty, its charms and its advantages, with a patronizing air—it was difficult to know whom to trust, or what to lean on.

"My advice was, to take to our heels and await events in Belgium. Combelaïne, however, was always as obstinate as a mule, and he declared that he would not yield one inch—that audacity alone could save us now. Audacity ! He must have found it very difficult to talk in this way, for the very night before his valet, Leonard, had left him to join the service of an Englishman, and everything indicated that this sudden step concealed some treason. No matter. Combelaïne declared that the game was still in our own hands, and that by a most lucky chance he knew when and by whom these papers had been stolen. 'The author of this bold blow was Raymond Delorge,' he said ; 'Fortunately,' he continued, 'he is in my power, and this very night, his account will be settled.' "

"And," interrupted Roberjot, "that very evening some spadassins attacked Raymond and injured him severely."

Did Verdale know this ? One would have said not, by the manner in which he raised his arms to Heaven. "Combelaïne," he cried, "is stronger than I thought, for he never gave me the smallest hint of this cowardly crime ! The very next day he dragged me into the presence of Madame de Maillefert, and signified to her that he must marry her daughter with the briefest possible delay. 'People are not generally married in Lent,' she answered, gravely ; 'but as you are the master, you must do as you choose.' I have hardly seen Combelaïne since that day, as he has been so occupied in purchasing the wedding presents, which he wishes to be more magnificent than anything ever seen before ; but when I have had a moment's chat with him, he has hastily said that things would go on smoothly. Delorge had the letters no doubt, but could not use them, so strictly was he watched. I was therefore, utterly thunderstruck when I heard last night, through my son, that Philippe de Maillefert had been arrested."

Calm as Verdale was in appearance, he was, in reality growing very nervous, for he was clear-headed enough to see that the most difficult moment of the explanation was yet to come.

"And so," began Roberjot, "you did nothing towards the arrest of the duke ? "

Verdale, with an indignant gesture, replied : "Do you doubt me ? "

"I——" began Dr. L gris.

"Then I have explained myself badly, gentlemen, very badly. Don't you see that throughout this deplorable affair I have been most outrageous, imposed upon and sacrificed?"

"I don't see that."

"Yes, sacrificed, for Combeldaine cannot injure the duke without injuring me. Ever since this arrest I have felt as if I were going mad. It may have the most disastrous consequences. Philippe stands next to me in the Rural Bank, but as he is under me, the responsibility of his appointment falls on me. I shall be examined and cross questioned until all my most secret affairs are known."

This was plausible enough.

"And yet," asked Roberjot, "how does it happen that when De Maillefert was arrested he sent to you as well as to Combeldaine, to say that he consented to everything?"

"Because he thinks me the accomplice of Combeldaine."

"What is it he consents to?"

"I have no idea—on my word of honour—I can only say," the architect added, after a brief pause, "that four days ago the marriage was as firm as ever, so firm that I agreed to let the duchess have thirty thousand francs for Mademoiselle Simone's outfit. The same evening, however, Combeldaine was so displeased with the manner in which the duke had treated him that afternoon, that he said to me: 'This idiot adopts a tone that I won't stand. I think he is meditating some grand stroke.' I told him if he wanted to get the upper hand of the young man, he had only to refuse to give him money. 'The deuce of it is,' he replied, 'that he has plenty of it, and for the life of me, I can't understand where he gets it from.'"

Legris, Raymond, and Roberjot exchanged a quick glance. One name was on the lips of all three—that of Laurent Cornevin.

"I admit your explanations, my dear sir," said Roberjot ceremoniously "only I don't see that there can be any mystery about the young duke's having money, as you say that Mademoiselle Simone has sold all her property?"

"But," replied the architect, with visible embarrassment—"But——"

"Did Mademoiselle Simone keep the proceeds of the sale of her estate?"

"I don't say that."

"Then where are they? We know that she has sold her property through the Baron de Boursonne, and it is through him, too, that we heard you were the purchaser."

Verdale started. "Excuse me, I did buy the land, but not in my own name. I bought it in the name of the Rural Bank, as I believed it would be a safe investment for the funds of that concern."

"That was very generous on your part, but whether the purchase was made in your name or that of the Rural Bank, you paid, I presume, and where is that money?"

Verdale became more and more agitated. "Nothing has been paid yet, for Combeldaine wished to retain his power over Philippe—a power which he would have lost if the duke had covered the deficit."

Roberjot nodded with cheerful acquiescence. But to himself he murmured: "What new villainy are we going to unearth here?"

Such, too, was Lucien Verdale's opinion, for he started forward. "De Combeldaine is a villain!" he exclaimed; "but you, my dear father, you will return what De Maillefert abstracted to the Rural Bank to-morrow."

"Three million five hundred thousand francs?"

"What does the amount matter?"

"Are you mad?" exclaimed Verdale, now livid with anger and fear. "That would do no good. Don't you understand that it was certificates and bonds that were stolen? And, besides, where should I get three million five hundred thousand francs from?"

"You are very rich, and if it were to take your whole fortune, this must be done. You understand what I say—it must be done—even if I, your own son, be compelled to come forward to testify against you. I may be the son of a dishonest man, but I will not be his accomplice."

"He will do as he says!" muttered the architect. "I know Lucien—he means it." And then with sudden violence, he burst forth: "You are like all the others, Lucien. You think me rich. Poor simpleton! Did ever a millionaire play the desperate game I have played, and which will perhaps throw me into a convict's cell? I was a millionaire once—I am so no longer. You look at me as you did not believe me. You ask what I have done with my fortune? I don't know. It went as it came. My speculations and investments have recently turned out badly. I lost my head, and lost my money. It is the story of us all—the men of the second empire, as we are called. Look at those we know—those whose prosperity has been most dazzling. Combelaïne stole with a gauntleted hand, Maumussey owes ten millions, the Princess d'Eljonsen resorts to the most revolting devices in order to keep up a semblance of luxury. If I stand firm as yet, to all appearance, it is because no one suspects my real situation. But open the window and proclaim it; and by to-morrow I should have nothing more to do but to start for Belgium and join the millionaires who have lost every halfpenny by disastrous speculations. We are all tottering, and we can get no help from the empire. The empire!" Why, it has given us all it has to give, and now that the strong boxes are empty, and there is nothing to pour into the eager hands which are held out, the empire will perish, crumble into dust—and no one knows this better than the ministers, the prefects and the emperor!"

Lucien Verdale's features betrayed astonishment and dismay. As long as he had believed his father to be wealthy, he had relied on a great pecuniary sacrifice bringing things right at last. But now! "Monsieur de Maillefert must, nevertheless, be rescued," he said, firmly.

The architect angrily replied: "Why do you repeat those words in that senseless way? Have I not laid the whole situation before you? Is it on me that the duke should rely, when I am quite as much involved as himself?"

"On whom, then, should he rely?"

"On whom? Why on the man who has Combelaïne's papers in his possession. On M. Raymond Delorge."

These words betrayed the secret of Verdale's feeble resistance. He believed that Raymond had these important papers in his possession.

"Then, according to you," said Roberjot, "M. Delorge is master of the situation?"

"Absolutely."

"How is that?"

Verdale shrugged his shoulders. "You can answer that question as well as I can," he replied.

This would have been true if Raymond had had the papers; but such was not the case, and to allow Laurent Cornevin to be suspected would have been a fatal mistake. So the lawyer found himself in a most delicate position. "No matter what I know," he answered, "but if you have no objection give me your ideas."

"I have none. I have nothing to fear from Combelaine now. And it strikes me that these papers place these people in your power. Threaten them with the publication of their correspondence and they will move heaven and earth. Still justice, you know, does not easily relinquish its prey, and M. Barban d'Avranchel is a most determined man. But the government would never allow so many of their own people to be compromised, particularly as that would hasten their own fall."

Roberjot thought the same. "So then," he said, "you think the whole affair can be stopped just where it is if the deficit were made up?"

Verdale hesitated, and then suddenly exclaimed: "Combelaine may not have disposed of all the certificates and bonds!"

"It is best not to count on that."

"Well, then, I, as chairman of the Rural Bank, and through the claim I have on a portion of Mademoiselle Simone's estate, might advance the date of payment for it."

Roberjot looked at his old school-friend as if anxious to read his very soul. "Would you do that?" he asked.

"And you," said the architect, "would you in return promise to restore me any letters of mine which are among these papers of Combelaine's?"

Unfortunately Roberjot could not give this promise, and he was trying to avoid a decisive reply, when Lucien Verdale interfered. "Be easy, gentlemen," he said, in a firm voice; "my father will do all that an honourable man should do without any conditions whatever."

Neither Raymond nor Dr. Legris, nor even M. Roberjot had any occasion to linger longer with the architect. They therefore took their leave, escorted to the door by Lucien, who told them that his father would do what they desired.

Verdale listened until not a sound of their steps could be heard. Then he rang the bell with a strange expression on his face. His own valet, a man who had served him for fifteen years, and whom he believed to be devoted to his interests, appeared. "Have you finished all your preparations?" asked the architect.

"I have forgotten nothing," answered the servant. "I have filled fifteen huge boxes, which I have placed in a store-house, hired under a feigned name."

Verdale smiled. "Then," he said, "to-morrow you will convey your boxes to the railway station, and proceed to Brussels with them. You will wait for me there. It is time to take to our heels."

V.

THE clock struck twelve as Raymond and his two friends left Verdale's sumptuous mansion. The doctor went out first in order to reconnoitre, and he was so extremely prudent that he even crossed the street to look into two particularly dark doorways. This was no time for rashness. He knew—they all knew—that Raymond's life hung on a thread. Persuaded finally that the street was deserted, the doctor made a sign to his companions to join him, and, as the weather was fair, they walked to the Champs Elysées, which was silent and deserted at this hour.

The interview which had just taken place had been so different to what they had anticipated, and had opened before them such a new horizon, that they wished to exchange their views and decide on the course to adopt.

Roberjot thought that it would be infinitely better for Raymond to disappear entirely. "Your cause, my dear fellow," he said, "is evidently in the hands of an able man, who has such means at his command that he is able to buy Combelaïne's valet and Madame Flora's household. Let him work in his own way, and don't expose him to the additional worry of watching over you at the same time, or the risk of being defeated just as he reaches the result he has been striving to achieve for so many years."

Dr. Legris entirely agreed with the lawyer. "Besides," he said, "you need have no anxiety. Verdale told you what could be done with those papers. You may be sure that Laurent Cornevin will know how to use them. Philippe is in prison, to be sure, but he will be released. Combelaïne's marriage is fixed, but it will never take place." And as Raymond did not speak, Dr. Legris exclaimed, impatiently: "What can you hope to do? What could you do, when you may be arrested at any moment?"

"I can prevent the marriage."

"In what way? By killing Combelaïne, you mean?"

"Yes, if there is no other way."

"Well, there is plenty of time for that when we are certain that there is nothing else to be done. And in the meanwhile look out that you are not landed in prison."

When they reached the Place de la Concorde, Raymond had yielded to the entreaties of his friends, and agreed that he would conceal himself in Dr. Legris's rooms while waiting for an opportunity to make a safe retreat. They exchanged a last shake of the hand, and when Roberjot crossed the Pont de la Concorde to return to the Rue Jacob, Raymond and the doctor went towards Montmartre. They went at a quick step along the deserted streets, turning innumerable corners and constantly looking round to see that they were not followed. They were very much astonished that Combelaïne did not watch the man whom he believed to be in possession of his correspondence, with more vigilance.

"Is it a snare?" said the doctor to himself.

When they reached the Place du Théâtre, where Dr. Legris resided, he redoubled his attention, and his vigilance was not lost, for suddenly he pressed his companion's arm. "There is my house," he said; "look."

Raymond obeyed, and in front of the house he saw a tall man walking up and down, with that unmistakable air of a person who had been waiting a long time and is beginning to grow impatient. "It is Krauss!" cried Raymond.

"At this hour?" asked the doctor. "Are you sure?"

"Oh, perfectly." And he called: "Krauss!"

The old soldier started, looked round, and when he saw the two young men, he hurried towards them. "At last!" he said. "I was beginning to despair."

"What is the matter?" asked Raymond, anxiously.

"Monsieur Jean Cornevin is in London, and has telegraphed that he will be here at the end of the week."

"Ah!"

"And one of your friends, the Baron de Boursonne, is very anxious to see you. He says he can do you a great service. I told him I should know to-morrow how he could get at you."

"He is a firm friend—give him the address of Dr. Legris."

But the doctor knew there was something more than this. "I told you, my good fellow, not to come here except at the last extremity."

"Yes, sir, and there is something else now. Only as it was such a particular thing I did not know——"

"You can speak before the doctor," said Raymond.

The faithful servant hesitated for a second; and then he said, in a low voice: "A young lady, sir, has been to see you."

"A young lady?"

"Yes, sir; she was very pretty, but she looked frightened to death. I think you must have spoken to her of me—for she knew me. Let me tell you all about it. I was just going to bed when the concierge came up, and said somebody wanted to see me. I went down and I found two ladies. The younger one said, hastily, that she wanted to see you at once, that your life and her's depended on it. I was considerably embarrassed. But she begged me so hard to take her where she could see you, that I——"

"You brought her?"

"Yes, sir; and she is just round the corner in a cab."

Raymond uttered an exclamation, and dashed off towards the vehicle which stood in the shade. It was Simone de Maillefert who was waiting for him, with her governess, Miss Lydia Dodge. Simone heard his step, and recognized it, for she leaned out of the window. "You!" he said; "you! Here at this hour!"

"Why should I heed hours now?" she answered, in that quick, harsh voice, natural to those who are conscious of mortal peril. "What have I to fear or love now? I was obliged to see you, and I came. You received my letter, did you not?"

"I received it, and fail to understand what I have done to merit it."

"I was mad when I wrote it. But why did you not answer it?"

"If you knew what I had been doing you would not ask that question——"

"I do know. You are mixed up with conspirators; you are discovered, and you are in concealment."

They spoke without the slightest precaution, so that the driver, considerably puzzled by the words he caught, slyly alighted from his box and approached the window. Fortunately, Krauss and Dr. Legris were watching. They called the driver, under the pretext of wanting a light for their cigars, and kept him far enough away from the vehicle so that he could hear nothing.

"When your letter reached me," said Raymond, "I had not heard of the terrible misfortune——"

"Which I would have averted at the price of life itself! A Duke de Maillefert accused of robbery—accused of forgery!"

She was sublime in her indignation. Never had Raymond loved her so passionately; never had he so fully realized that life without her was impossible. "But your brother is not guilty!" he cried.

Simone looked at him. "How did you know?" she asked.

"I know that all your brother did was, in his eyes, a pure fiction. It was you only whom he intended to pillage and deceive."

Simone hid her face in her hands, and sobbed convulsively. "Alas!" she said, "the odious farce he fancied he was enacting is more odious than the crime itself. This is his punishment. My mother went to see him, but the jailers refused to open his door for her. And yet it is possible that the crowning disgrace of a trial may be avoided. It is for that I came. Can I rely on your aid?"

"My body and soul belong to you—you know that."

"I believe it, and it is that belief which gives me courage to say to you : Raymond, my best beloved, sacrifice for me the sacred memory of your murdered father—the hopes of your whole life—your legitimate vengeance——"

"What do you mean ?" he stammered, faint and sick at heart.

She leaned toward him. "Give me those papers," she whispered, "those papers that belonged to M. de Combelaïne."

"Gracious heavens!" he exclaimed.

She misunderstood the meaning of his exclamation, for she added, with her hands clasped in an agony of supplication: "I know the extent of the sacrifice, Raymond. With these papers—for he told me so himself—you can ruin Combelaïne and all his associates. But do you know what he promises me in exchange? For my brother, a restoration of his forfeited honour, and liberty for myself. You hear," she continued, "liberty—liberty to dispose of my own hand. If not—as the honour of the house of De Maillefert must be preserved—I shall marry this man on Tuesday next."

"On Tuesday?"

"Yes, it is a settled thing. And De Combelaïne has arranged matters so adroitly that no one knows it."

Then Raymond cried out desperately: "But I have not got them. I don't possess those papers which would be our salvation."

Truth was in his tone, and Simone sank back in the carriage. "All is over, then," she murmured. "And yet, they were carried off. Who has them?"

The name of Laurent Cornevin was on Raymond's lips, but he had the courage—courage almost superhuman under the circumstances—not to utter it. "I don't know," he replied.

It was easy to see what it cost Simone to renounce the hope by which she had been sustained. "But Combelaïne," she said, "thinks you have these letters, for it was he who sent me to you."

"He sent you?"

"He told me, moreover, that it was owing to him that you were not yet arrested."

"Not yet arrested! Excuse me—but was it in your mother's presence that he gave you this advice?"

"No; he even begged me to conceal it from her."

Raymond caught at this gleam of light. "Combelaïne distrusts your mother, then. And why? What does she say to you of this marriage?"

"Nothing. After several days of intense depression, she all at once regained her carelessness. Even my brother's arrest did not depress her. Sometimes I have asked myself if she is in full possession of her reason. In talking about Philippe, she says: 'Nonsense! It will all come right,' and to me, 'You are not yet married. Even at the mayor's door you need not renounce hope.'"

Raymond reflected. "This indifference," he thought to himself, "can only prove that the duchess and Cornevin understand each other. Have they a decisive blow in reserve?" And then he added aloud: "I will be more explicit than your mother, Simone, and I swear to you that you shall never marry that man."

"What do you hope to do, then?"

He gently replied. "Allow me to keep my secret a little longer."

The driver was summoned, mounted his box, and gathered up his reins, while Simone said, in a low, faint voice: "Farewell, Raymond! My last

hope is gone. It has sustained my strength for a few hours. And now I must tell M. de Combelaine the result of this interview with you."

"At this hour."

"Yes; he must be awaiting my return before our house in his brougham. God have pity on us."

Then extending her hand to Raymond, who pressed it to his lips, she said once more: "Farewell."

"Until Tuesday," murmured Raymond, as the cab drove off, and almost immediately Dr. Legris' honest voice was heard in his ear.

"Well, you are pleased, I trust? This step strikes me as pretty significant."

"Did you hear what she said?"

"Not a word. Nor did Krauss."

"No, sir," and the old soldier touched his hat.

"But it does not need any excessive brilliancy to know that she came for the papers which Combelaine thinks you took from Flora Misri."

"Precisely, that's what she came for, and if I had the papers——"

"You would have given them to her?"

"Instantly."

The doctor took off his hat and made a profound bow. "My compliments to you! Fortunately these blessed papers are in firmer hands than yours and will not escape from them until the right moment."

"Not until too late, probably. Do you know that the wedding is fixed for Tuesday?"

"What does that prove? Simply that Laurent Cornevin is master of the situation, and that he will be ready."

"But if he is not?"

"Then I shall be the first to say: Take the matter into your own hands. But I am not afraid. Cornevin is on the lookout."

Dr. Legris had been absent all day with Raymond, and it is not with impunity that a physician, with a practice like his, steals so many hours for his own affairs. Twenty patients had called, and some of them had returned three or four times; and he could read their names on a slate which lay on his table. But it was not this which attracted his attention. On his table lay a folded paper all by itself, as if to indicate its importance. It was, in fact, a summons to appear before the investigating magistrate, M. Barban d'Avranchel, in his private office, but without the least indication why.

"Barban d'Avranchel! is not that the magistrate who has poor Philippe's case in hand?" asked the doctor.

"Yes," replied Raymond, "and it is he, too, who, at the time of my father's death, managed the inquest, and carried Combelaine out triumphantly."

This summons puzzled Legris so much that he could hardly close his eyes, and at daybreak he walked into Raymond's room, and said:

"I would give ten louis this minute if it were time to present myself before this M. Barban d'Avranchel."

He saw a number of patients, and at nine o'clock was ready to make his round of visits, of which he selected the most pressing ones.

"I shall try to find an asylum for you," he said to Raymond, "for we must run no risks. As soon as Combelaine knows that you have not got the papers, he will have you arrested." And as Raymond began to thank him, he added: "Never mind that now. To-day I haven't a second to spare. I

must go at once to Batignolles to prepare a place for Madame Flora. But don't show yourself to anyone here. My servant, who has her orders, will not allow anyone to come in except the Baron de Boursonne, whom you expect."

Less than half an hour had elapsed after the doctor's departure, when the servant opened the door, and said, mysteriously: "This is the gentleman, sir."

At the same moment M. de Boursonne brushed passed the woman, and exclaimed: "Here you are at last. Do you know that I made this journey for your sake alone. I bring you some great news."

Surprising, indeed, was the intelligence brought from Anjou by the old nobleman. A fortnight after Raymond's departure, huge yellow placards had burst out all over walls and fences, announcing the sale by auction of the De Maillefert property. The conditions of the sale were so peculiar, that everybody was astonished at the awkwardness of the men who had this important business in hand. The baron made up his mind at once that this awkwardness was intentional, and intended to drive away purchasers, and would, therefore, tend to the disposal of the property at two-thirds of its value. "Who could profit by this manoeuvre?" This question the baron at once applied himself to solve. "A Parisian—a certain Baron Verdale—had announced that he had determined to buy everything belonging to Mademoiselle Simone in the name of the Rural Bank, a flourishing financial concern, of which he was the chairman. The most moderate calculations set down the profits of this Verdale at a million or fifteen hundred thousand francs. People admired his cunning and skill, but all at once a rumour arose. After the sale had taken place, during the forty-eight hours' grace that elapse before it is final, a stranger—an Englishman—appeared at the notary's office, and claimed the legal privilege of the highest bidder, insisting on the surrender of the property to him, or on a new sale taking place. "To write all this would have been too long, my dear Delorge," said the baron in conclusion. "So I preferred to come and tell it, and at the same time enjoy your astonishment."

But Raymond was not astonished. Verdale's reticence the evening before had prepared him for the discovery of any manoeuvres, destined to throw part of Mademoiselle de Maillefert's property into the architect's hands. And as to the Englishman who had appeared so opportunely on the scene, with his millions in his hand, who could he be, except Laurent Cornevin?

This was also the baron's idea, when Raymond laid the position of things before him. They then proceeded to calculate the consequences of these events, when all at once the door was thrown open and Dr. Legris entered, out of breath from having run up three stairs at a time, and quite radiant with joy. "Victory!" he cried; "Victory! This time Combelaïne won't escape!" But he stopped short, for he saw the old engineer, whom he had not at first perceived.

"Go on!" said Raymond; "this gentleman is the Baron de Boursonne, from whom I have no secrets."

Dr. Legris complied. "I have just come from M. Barban d'Avranchel," he said, "and through him I learned—but let me begin at the beginning."

He then dropped onto a chair and wiped his forehead. "I was punctual," he said; "and precisely at five minutes to one I presented myself at the Palais de Justice, with my summons in my hand. I was kept waiting some ten minutes, and was beginning to feel impatient, when I saw—well come! whom do you think I saw appear?"

"Combelaïne !" cried Raymond.

"No ; a fellow practitioner—Dr. Buiron. Was he delighted to see me ? By no means. On the contrary, he exclaimed : 'What the deuce are you here for ?' 'I am waiting my turn for examination,' I said, 'and you ?' 'I !' he answered ; 'oh, I was summoned by the magistrate, and heaven only knows what for.' I assure you I was never so much astonished in my life, but I said with a laugh : 'You must have committed some crime.' He turned deadly pale—and then, merely to annoy him, I added : 'Or, if you haven't committed one yourself, you have helped somebody else.'

"My little jest did not seem to amuse him ; however, he looked very embarrassed. Just then the door of the magistrate's private room opened and a man came out. I recognized him at once as that fellow Grollet who was once a groom at the Elysée stables. He now has a large livery establishment of his own, and is very well off. I saw him the other evening at the house of the actress who has got the young Duke de Mallefert into so much trouble. But he was not at the Palais as a witness—for two police agents took him between them and walked him off."

"Grollet arrested !" murmured Raymond. "Grollet—the false witness !"

"Yes ! and to tell the truth I looked so astonished that Buiron asked me what the matter was. Before I could reply, however, I heard my name shouted. My turn had come, and with a bow to my *confrère* I entered the room. I found the magistrate to be a man of the most perfect breeding, polite to a fault, but icy and pompous to a degree.

"Do you know what he wanted ?

"The particulars of the attempt to murder you on the outer boulevard, near the Café de Périclès."

"How do they know anything about it ?"

"I can't tell you that ; but they certainly know it all, and the magistrate said he was on the track of the criminals."

"Did he mention Combelaïne ?"

Dr. Legris shook his head. "D'Avranchel is not an eagle," he said ; "but he is too cunning to name the count. However, after I had answered all his questions, I wished to know if he suspected the truth. With an easy, indifferent air I said : 'It seems to me quite impossible that the law can reach the guilty parties in this case.' 'The law,' he answered, 'always reaches the guilty parties. It is slow to strike sometimes, but it strikes all the more terribly at last.' 'Yes,' I interrupted ; 'except when the criminals are covered by the statute of limitation.'

"M. d'Avranchel rose as he spoke to me. 'You are right,' he said. 'Only it may so happen that a man who has committed one crime which has remained unpunished, commits another, and then it is that Justice interferes.'"

VI.

THE ideas advanced by the investigating magistrate were open to argument, but not the meaning of his allusions. So victory might be near at hand, and this was all the more reason why Raymond should conceal himself from Combelaïne. Dr. Legris had found a place of safety for him, but he refused to go there. He said he should prefer to take refuge in the apartment he had rented in the Rue de Grenelle.

"They will never look for me there," he simply said ; "because it seems the height of madness for me to go there."

This was good reasoning to a certain extent, but the doctor was not satisfied nor duped. "Acknowledge," he said, impatiently, "that you wish to watch the Maillefert mansion, so as to be sure that the wedding won't take place without your knowledge."

"You are right," Raymond replied, in a determined tone—but he never theless took some precautions in going to his room, which he reached about seven in the evening.

"Don't leave the house," Dr. Legris had said to him. "I will come once every day to bring you some news; but I must be off now, for I am expected elsewhere."

Dr. Legris was to meet Madame Flora Misri, who arrived out of breath long after the appointed hour, at their rendezvous in the Rue de Suresnes. "I have had great difficulty getting here," she said to Legris. "I have so much to tell you——"

"Go on," exclaimed the doctor.

"Combelaïne has come back to me! He thought I was with Lucy, and so he sent a letter by one of his friends. And what do you think he proposes?"

"Tell me!"

"He writes that he is half crazy; that he has never cared for any one but me, that he is in despair, and will break off the marriage, if I say so. In short, he proposes that we should leave France and get married in America."

The doctor shuddered. "And what did you say?" he quickly asked. "I hesitated," she replied, "because this man has occupied so much of my life, that it seems to me at times as if I belonged to him. If he had come himself—if I had heard his voice—if he had bidden me follow him, I know myself so well, that I feel certain I should have obeyed him. Fortunately, he did not come. And Lucy was by my side. Lucy pointed out to me that if I were to go away with Victor, he would not hesitate to poison me to get hold of my money."

"And so?"

"And so I have come to implore you to conceal me!"

In another hour Madame Misri was safe in the little house of the widow, at Batignolles; and Dr. Legris was at home again, reflecting on these strange and rapid events. Flora Misri, the millionaire, was Combelaïne's last card, and that he played it now, showed that he believed the game lost.

The next day Dr. Legris told all this to Raymond, hoping that he would take it as a small consolation. But Raymond chose to look at it in a very different light. "That will not prevent the marriage," he said. "Quite the contrary. Combelaïne will carry it out just the same. The whole mansion has been in confusion to-day. I have watched it attentively. Tradespeople have been going in with enormous packages. They are preparing for the wedding."

The doctor began to argue the point.

"I will wait until the last minute," interrupted Raymond, "for so I promised you; but I swear to you that Simone shall never bear the name of my father's murderer." And as he spoke he pointed to the table, where lay a pair of revolvers.

This was Saturday. The next day, about eight o'clock, Raymond saw Simone leave the house on foot, with Miss Dodge, undoubtedly to go to mass. About four o'clock Combelaïne entered the mansion. On Monday in the afternoon the doctor arrived, all out of breath. He brought an astonishing

piece of news, which had been in circulation at the Bourse, and which was generally believed.

The chairman of the Rural Bank, Baron Verdale, had disappeared, carrying an immense sum away with him. Some said he had gone to England, while, according to others, he had been arrested on the Belgian frontier.

"Yes, this is an important piece of information," said Raymond; "but all the same, it will not prevent Combelaine's marriage. To-morrow is Tuesday, and there is nothing to indicate any change in the arrangements."

The doctor did not speak; he was beginning to feel anxious. Where was Cornevin? Would he not appear? Still he hesitated to say to Raymond, "Act!"

The night was one long agony to Delorge, and the day had hardly broken when he was behind his blinds watching the Maillefert mansion. There was a certain bustle of preparations in the court-yard. At nine o'clock several carriages drove up, and out of them stepped the Princess d'Eljonsen, Dr. Buiron, the Duke and Duchess de Maumussy, with a few other members of their set; and, finally, all in black, except his cravat and gloves, which were snowy white, there appeared the Count de Combelaine. There was no room for further doubt.

"Come!" said Raymond, solemnly, "let my destiny be accomplished." So saying, he slipped the two revolvers into his pocket and hurried towards the mairie adjoining the Palais Bourbon.

There also a great deal of bustle was apparent, and a number of attendants were hurrying through the passages with carpets and chairs. Raymond stopped one of the servants and asked him: "What is going on?"

"A wedding—a count marries the daughter of a duchess." And then the fellow mentioned by which stairs and passages these people would reach the mayor's rooms, and in which apartment the civil ceremony of marriage would take place.

"Thank you, my friend," said Raymond, who calmly proceeded to select the spot most favourable for his design.

His sufferings were over, for he had ceased to reflect; he said to himself, simply and wearily, that all would soon be finished. He stretched out his arm mechanically to see that it did not tremble, and then stood still like stone.

He lost his immobility, however, when he heard the carriages dash up; for at the sound he darted to a window. "It is they!" he said to himself.

Then as he turned to regain the position he had selected, he found himself face to face with a stalwart man whose face was bright with intelligence and energy, and who wore the same livery as the grooms attached to the president's palace in 1851. This man caught him by the arm, and exclaimed, in an undertone: "Madman! what are you going to do?"

Raymond felt as if he were choking. He knew this man. He knew him to be the Englishman who had come to his rescue on the day of Victor Noir's funeral, and he recognized him also as the same person who had saved him on the evening of Rochefort's arrest. "It is you," he stammered.

"Yes," said the stranger, simply; "yes, it is I." And in a peremptory tone, he added, "Why do you carry those weapons in your pocket?"

Raymond made no attempt at denial. "I could not see any other way,"

he answered slowly, "of preventing my father's murderer from marrying the woman I love."

With an imperious gesture the stranger interrupted him. "Didn't you know that I was watching over you?"

"Forgive me, but——"

"Do you think I would allow another crime to be added to the long catalogue?"

Raymond shook his head sadly. "You have undertaken a most formidable task, sir," he said. "You don't know that this love of mine has been my very existence. I tried to meet you——"

Again did the man check him. "Events," he said, "were stronger than my will. Had I been discovered, all would have been lost, and I was determined—more especially for your own sake—to conquer."

At the bottom of the great staircase the sounds of many feet could be distinguished.

"Do you hear," murmured Raymond.

"Yes, I hear; but we have a minute still. One day, eighteen years ago, I was carried off, and suppressed as it were. I left behind me in Paris a wife and five children whom I adored. They were without friends and without money, and all of them might have perished, but, thanks to your mother, they were saved. I am here to-day, so that Madame Delorge, the noble woman who saved my children, may in her turn be made happy."

The noise on the staircase increased. Raymond began to speak.

"Silence," said the stranger. "No matter what you see or what you hear, no matter how far things seem to be going, remember that you are not to move nor speak—I am here!" And he drew Raymond into the recess of a window, where the two stood together.

It was time they drew back. The wedding-party was on the staircase. First came Mademoiselle Simone de Maillefert, whiter than her white raiment, whiter than the virginal wreath upon her brow. She leaned on the arm of the Duke de Maumussy, whose breast was covered with decorations. At the sight of Simone, Raymond felt all the blood in his body surge to his brain, and he caught at the wall for support. And yet pale as was the woman he loved, he fancied he detected in her eyes and on her lips a faint smile of hope.

She passed on, and after her came Combelaïne, looking frightfully calm, and the Princess d'Eljonsen, and the Duchess de Maillefert; then Madame de Maumussy and Dr. Buiron, followed by two or three other persons, for it was impossible to give any solemnity to this marriage, when the heir of the name—the last of the Dukes de Maillefert—was in prison, accused of forgery and embezzlement.

"Come," said the stranger, drawing Raymond into the mayor's room, where they hid themselves in the rear of the sightseers.

The mayor arrived, wearing his tricolour sash of office. He was a tall old man, bald and thin, and as grave as the law he represented. He took up his position behind a desk covered with green baize, with his right hand resting on a large volume—the code Napoléon—yellow and worn from use.

"What are you waiting for?" whispered Raymond, anxiously.

"Hush," said the stranger.

The mayor, in a paternal voice, made a little speech, in which he spoke of the peaceful joys of a well-assorted union and the reciprocal duties of husband and wife. He glanced about for approval, but as the wedding

party remained stiff and cold, he got entangled in his discourse, and hastily passed on to the ordinary formulas. At last he put the usual questions "Monsieur le Comte de Combelaïne, do you consent to take Mademoiselle Simone de Maillefert, here present, for your wedded wife?"

The count was on the point of replying affirmatively, when suddenly Raymond's companion stepped forward, and in a loud voice exclaimed: "This marriage is impossible!"

De Combelaïne turned at once, and seeing this man dressed in the livery formerly worn by the grooms of the Elysée, he cried: "What, Laurent Cornevin!"

But the count was a formidable adversary. He gathered together enough energy to keep down all signs of concern, and regaining his superb impudence: "By what right," he asked, "does this man interrupt this solemnity?"

"By the right," answered Cornevin, "that all honest men have to prevent a scoundrel who is already married from committing bigamy!"

The mayor's embarrassment was very great. "The Count de Combelaïne has been married," he said, "but we have the certificate of the death of his first wife, Marie Sidonie, in good form."

Cornevin advanced, towering above all the people about him, his bright face shining with honesty. "You may have a certificate of death, sir," he said, "but it is none the less true that the coffin of Marie Sidonie, at the Montmartre cemetery, is empty. There are witnesses who can testify to these facts. I call on Madame de Maillefert and on Raymond Delorge, here present."

Combelaïne protested loudly. "My wife died in Italy——" he began.

"Enough!" interrupted Cornevin, in a tone of authority; "enough! And now, if you please, M. de Combelaïne, I will tell you the story of your marriage. Finding yourself in one of those seasons of shameful poverty, which have been so frequent in your life, you married an unfortunate orphan simply to get possession of the hundred thousand francs which were hers. Did you dream, even at that time, of denying the marriage? Very possibly—for even your most intimate friends were ignorant of it, and no one ever knew the Countess de Combelaïne. At the end of six months the hundred thousand francs were gone, and you were bound to her for life. But you are a man of expedients, and the law has prodigious latitude and strange indulgences. In less than a year you succeeded in corrupting your wife and throwing her into the arms of a lover. Then, one night you appeared, armed with that terrible clause of the code which gives an outraged husband the right of life and death. You talked very loud, declaring that the law was on your side. To purchase her life, Marie Sidonie consented to leave France and to die in the eyes of the world. A few months later you received a coffin from Italy which contained some sand, with a false certificate of death."

The ground was crumbling away under Combelaïne's feet—and yet he persisted in struggling. "This man is an imposter," he cried.

But Cornevin laughed. "Do you want proofs?" he asked. "Very well, I have them, for I know all your life, since the day that Madame d'Eljonson launched you into the world. I know how you were ignominiously dismissed from the army for cheating at cards. I was present when you assassinated General Delorge. I can prove that you were the guilty party in the forgeries that have been attributed to Philippe de Maillefert. If Marie Sidonie's testimony is required, be easy, I know where to find her,"

A wild beast seeking escape in a sudden extremity, might look like Combelaïne looked while Laurent Cornevin was speaking. But, suddenly, the count turned to the mayor, who was almost stupefied, and said : " Sir, I wish to speak to you in private."

" Follow me into my study, then," replied the municipal magistrate. And he and the count at once passed through a small door.

Almost immediately, however, the mayor reappeared alone, and with a most disturbed air exclaimed : " He has gone—my study has another door which leads out on to the stairs."

" The wretch has fled, has he ?" said Cornevin, quietly. " What does that matter ? The judge, Barban d'Avranchel, has issued a warrant against him."

He laughed aloud—Cornevin did—as he saw the marriage guests slink towards the door—the Duke de Maumussy and Dr. Buiron, then the Princess d'Eljonson, Madame de Maumussy, and the others ; so that no one was left with him, except the mayor, the Duchess de Maillefert, Mademoiselle Simone, and Raymond. For the first time in her life, perhaps, Madame de Maillefert was sincerely moved. Seizing Cornevin's hands, she exclaimed : " What do I not owe you, sir ? Thank God that I confided in you ! You have kept all your promises. My unhappy son alone——"

" Monsieur Philippe, madame, will be released to-day. Justice recognizes the fact that in this matter he has only been very imprudent. The deficit of the Rural Bank has been made good."

" And by you, sir. You have restored us our honour, life, and fortune. How shall we ever repay you ?"

As Cornevin listened he glanced at Raymond, who, with Simone, had retreated to the embrasure of a window. If Simone were weeping it was certainly with joy. " You know what you promised, madame ?" remarked Laurent.

" Before a month, sir, my daughter will be Madame Delorge," answered the duchess.

Cornevin triumphed, but his strong mind was not disturbed by his success. He now went towards Raymond. " All is not settled yet," he said. " As long as Combelaïne is not under bolts and bars, so long I tremble I must leave you. You are in trouble respecting your connection with the ' Friends of Justice,' but here is a safe conduct from the judge. Go home at once ; your mother is dying of suspense. In a couple of hours I will be with you."

When Raymond was in the street, he asked himself if he was dreaming. Was this blessed tranquillity real, which had come to him after such intolerable anguish ? On reaching the Rue Blanche, he embraced his mother and sister with such evident agitation that at first they were alarmed, but they soon saw that it was not sorrow that excited him.

" It is all right, then," murmured Pauline.

Raymond looked at her, and seeing her colour deeply, he asked : " You know then ?"

" Yes, Jean wrote to me, so that — But I have just told mamma all about it."

" It looks to me," said Raymond, " as if there would be two marriages instead of one."

But his joy did not make him forget Dr. Legris. He hastened to write, and beg him to come to him at once.

After dispatching Krauss with this note, he felt that he must be alone to regain his equilibrium, and accustom himself to his new happiness. He had

been about an hour in his room, when suddenly he heard a man talking very loudly in the passage. He seemed to be arguing with the old servant. Raymond rose to see what it meant, when the door of his study was thrown open.

De Combelaïne came in. He still wore his wedding garments, but in what a disordered condition! His cravat was torn, and his gloves hung in strips on his hands. He shut the door and locked it, and then standing in front of Raymond with his arms folded and his eyes blood-shot—"It is I," he said, in a husky voice. "Not content with ruining me, you have deprived me of my last resource. Flora Misri has disappeared; Verdale is in prison. While I was in the mayor's rooms, the police seized all I had in the world in the way of money and valuables, so that flight is impossible. This is too much. There are some people who are too dangerous not to be allowed to fly."

"What do you want?" asked Raymond, who saw his revolver on the writing-table within his reach.

Combelaïne went closer to him and hissed in his ear: "Over and over again you have wished me to fight with you. I am here to say that I am ready to meet you now."

The impudence of this man was incredible. How did he dare, now that he was unmasked, to propose a duel, the supreme expedient of men of honour?

"You forget," said Raymond, coldly, "that I have only to call out aloud to bring in the officers who are bidden to arrest you."

A spasm of rage contracted Combelaïne's features. "We are alone," he said, and his violence increased, "before anyone comes—There are weapons here! Are you afraid? What can I say to stir up your blood? Shall I recall the Garden of the Elysée to you? Shall I remind you that less than an hour ago the woman you love leaned on my arm? that she was to have been mine, and that I adore her?"

On hearing this, Raymond snatched a sword from a trophy of weapons on the wall, and threw it at Combelaïne's feet. Then tearing down the one which hung across his father's portrait, he drew it from its scabbard, shivering the red seals, and placed himself on guard, crying: "So be it! Let God Himself decide between us?"

De Combelaïne attacked him with blind fury. This mortal contest between these two men in this narrow space was something terrible. The clash of steel rang through the house; furniture was overthrown, glass was broken, and Combelaïne's hoarse cries—for he had acquired the habit of shouting with the foils when a fencing master—were most formidable. Raymond was slightly wounded in the neck; and his blood flowed profusely, when, all at once, violent blows were heard on the door, and it was burst open by herculean shoulders. In the passage outside stood Laurent Cornevin, Krauss, Dr. Legris, the baron, Madame Delorge, and the worthy old Ducoudray.

"Let no one come in!" cried Raymond, in a terrible voice. "This man belongs to me. Cornevin, see that no one interferes!"

These few words nearly cost him his life, for Combelaïne gave a tremendous thrust. But Raymond parried it, and as he sprang aside he found himself just under his father's portrait. Then when Combelaïne, determined on killing him, made another lunge forward, it was the face of General Delorge he saw, and it was the eyes of the man he had assassinated that his own gaze met.

"The general!" he cried, recoiling as before a spectre.

He did not utter another word. Raymond's sword pierced his breast and passed out between his shoulders. The sword of the dying wretch dropped from his hand, foam gathered on his lips, a last blasphemy was strangled in his throat, he fell with his face on the ground. He was dead!

VII.

THUS did Laurent Cornevin accomplish his task. What energy and patience he had needed to reconstruct piece by piece the whole life of Combelaïne and his accomplices, and overthrow so silently and certainly the complicated edifice raised by their intrigues!

However, he had been aided in his perilous task by his courageous wife. For on his last return to Paris he could no longer resist his ardent desire to see her, and it was in her house that he had been hidden during these last months of contest. But he was avenged. And it was from his lips that Madame Delorge and Raymond learned all that had taken place in the garden of the Elysée, on the fatal night preceding the *coup d'état*.

This was his story: "I was on duty one Sunday night, when at about one o'clock I was suddenly called. I ran forward and found myself in the presence of M. de Maumussy. 'Take a lantern,' he said, 'and follow me.' I obeyed him, and we turned into the broad avenue behind the hedge. Two men, General Delorge and the Count de Combelaïne, were disputing, the general being very calm, while De Combelaïne was furious. At last De Combelaïne drew his sword. 'You shall swear,' he cried, 'on your honour as a soldier, not to say one word of the secret you have wrung from me.' 'It was entirely without my own consent that I became your confident,' answered the general, 'so I shall say just as much and just as little as I choose. I shall speak if honour commands it.'

"M. de Maumussy here interfered. 'But we cannot allow you to leave us in this way,' he said. 'What do you mean?' asked the general. 'I have my sword,' cried De Combelaïne: 'you have yours.' But the general answered—'I will not fight with you; let me pass, if you please.' Then De Combelaïne threw himself across his path, and cried out, passionately. 'You shan't go! You shall fight, I tell you!' The general drew himself up to his full height. 'And I,' he said, 'I repeat to you that I will not fight with a man who has been dismissed from the army for cheating at cards.' On hearing this, De Combelaïne drew back and made a tremendous lunge at the general, exclaiming: 'That will prevent you from betraying us.' The general immediately dropped, and Maumussy and Combelaïne fled from the spot.

"I knelt by the general's side, and heard the rattle in his throat. 'I have had my death blow,' he murmured; 'prop me up against a tree.' I did what he asked, and then he said: 'Feel my pocket and give me my notebook.' I gave it to him, and he tore out a leaf and wrote in pencil by the light of my lantern 'I am dying—murdered by Combelaïne with the connivance of Maumussy, because I found out that to-morrow——.' But at this point his strength failed him—he could not finish the phrase—still he added his signature, and then in an almost inaudible voice he said: 'Swear to give that paper to my wife!'

"I swore—but he was too far gone to hear me, I think; and he had indeed just breathed his last when De Combelaïne and De Maumussy reappeared. They took counsel together in low voices; and then they drew the general's sword from the scabbard and threw it on the ground. I helped them carry the body into a large hall, which had not been used for some time. I thought

they had forgotten me, but I was mistaken. The next day I went to Passy to obey the general's orders, but unfortunately Madame Delorge could not receive me. As I left her house two men, whom I did not know, approached me and asked what I wanted with the general's widow. I answered that it was none of their business. 'In that case,' they said, 'we arrest you.' The general's note-book lying on the ground had put the assassins on the track of the note in my possession, and they were determined to have it at any price. However, I have it still." And Cornevin, as he spoke, handed Madame Delorge the lines written by her dying husband.

Death came to De Combelaïne in altogether too gentle a form, but it had the immense advantage of putting an end to the scandalous suit from which the honour of the house of Maillefert could not have emerged without a smirch.

The next day, when the deficit in the Rural Bank was made good, the young duke was set free, and went off to Italy. He declared that he had received a lesson which he should never forget; but all the same, he took Madame Lucy Bergam with him on his trip.

Verdale, arrested at the Belgian frontier, was less fortunate; he stood his trial and was acquitted, to be sure, but he was ruined in reputation and pocket. Grollet, who was proved by Barban d'Avranchel to have been Combelaïne's accomplice in the attempt on Raymond's life—Grollet, the perjured witness of 1851—was condemned to ten years' imprisonment; while the day after Combelaïne's death the Duke de Maumussy took to his bed, and after a fortnight's illness died. Again was the word, poison, whispered. Was there any truth in the report? Only the duchess could have answered this question. But she was occupied with very different matters, having just signed an engagement with the manager of an American theatre.

The Duchess de Maillefert kept her word, and the unhappy Simone de Maillefert became the happy Madame Raymond Delorge. The day they were married Pauline Delorge, moreover, became Madame Jean Cornevin.

Poor Flora Misri had a terrible blow at this time. She wished to settle a handsome fortune on her nephew, but Dr. Legris and Ducoudray were obliged to explain to her that her money was such as honest people could not touch, and that she now ought to have but one aim, that of making herself forgotten. "Good God!" she cried, "what am I to do with my millions?"

Dark days were approaching. The empire, with dizzy swiftiness, rolled close to the edge of the abyss. After plots, counter-plots, and riots there came the plebiscitum; and then followed war, declared with a light heart, but culminating in defeat and revolution. It was all over. All the lying prosperity of eighteen years ended in unexampled disaster and invasion.

Raymond, Jean, and Léon joined the same regiment, and shut up at Belfort, they were spared the shame of a capitulation. M. Philippe, too, felt the blood of his ancestors grow hot in his veins. He was placed at the head of a battalion of Mobiles, and one day received orders to attack a Prussian barricade. His men hesitated. "I will bet you a hundred louis that I am killed!" he cried, and urging his horse on, he fell dead, riddled with bullets. But the barricade was taken.

If you go to Rosiers you will certainly stop at the inn of the Rising Sun, and M. Bizet de Chenchutte, after you have told him this story, will no doubt suggest that you should visit the Château de Maillefert, which has been magnificently restored; Bizet has charge of the property and keeps the keys; and it is the glory of his life that he is the friend of Raymond and his wife, as well as of the Cornevin family, the Baron de Boursonne and Dr. Legris.

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